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# *The works of Honoré de Balzac*

Honoré de Balzac

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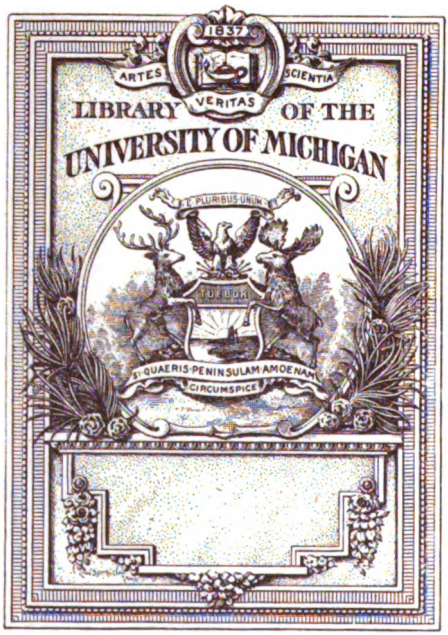


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*THE COMEDY OF HUMAN LIFE*

By H. DE BALZAC

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SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE

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# THE VILLAGE RECTOR

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Laurent Desrousseaux

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*" The engineer then saw plainly the shelf or barricade of rock mentioned by Farrabesche ; which forms, as it were, the lowest foundation of the hills."*

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ATHENAEUM EDITION

THE
WORKS OF

# Honoré de Balzac

TRANSLATED BY
KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

VOLUME XIV

## THE VILLAGE RECTOR
## SONS OF THE SOIL

*ILLUSTRATED*
BY LAURENT-DESROUSSEAUX AND A. P. LAURENS

THE ATHENAEUM CLUB
NEW YORK

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## TO HÉLÈNE.

THE tiniest boat is not launched upon the sea without the protection of some living emblem or revered name, placed upon it by the mariners. In accordance with this time-honored custom, Madame, I pray you to be the protectress of this book now launched upon our literary ocean; and may the imperial name which the Church has canonized and your devotion has doubly sanctified for me guard it from perils.

DE BALZAC.

173621

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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"The engineer then saw plainly the shelf or barricade of rock mentioned by Farrabesche; which forms, as it were, the lowest foundation of the hills" *Frontispiece*

"The street was lined with spectators, all anxious to see the Sauviats' daughter" . . . . . 38

"A little girl, employed, no doubt, to watch the house, heard the steps of a man with creaking shoes on the great square flags of the ground-floor rooms" . . . 115

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# THE VILLAGE RECTOR.

## I.

### THE SAUVIATS.

In the lower town of Limoges, at the corner of the rue de la Vieille-Poste and the rue de la Cité might have been seen, a generation ago, one of those shops which were scarcely changed from the period of the middle-ages. Large tiles seamed with a thousand cracks lay on the soil itself, which was damp in places, and would have tripped up those who failed to observe the hollows and ridges of this singular flooring. The dusty walls exhibited a curious mosaic of wood and brick, stones and iron, welded together with a solidity due to time, possibly to chance. For more than a hundred years the ceiling, formed of colossal beams, bent beneath the weight of the upper stories, though it had never given way under them. Built *en colombage*, that is to say, with a wooden frontage, the whole façade was covered with slates, so put on as to form geometrical figures, — thus preserving a naïve image of the burgher habitations of the olden time.

None of the windows, cased in wood and formerly adorned with carvings, now destroyed by the action of



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the weather, had continued plumb; some bobbed forward, others tipped backward, while a few seemed disposed to fall apart; all had a compost of earth, brought from heaven knows where, in the nooks and crannies hollowed by the rain, in which the spring-tide brought forth fragile flowers, timid creeping plants, and sparse herbage. Moss carpeted the roof and draped its supports. The corner pillar, with its composite masonry of stone blocks mingled with brick and pebbles, was alarming to the eye by reason of its curvature; it seemed on the point of giving way under the weight of the house, the gable of which overhung it by at least half a foot. The municipal authorities and the commissioner of highways did, eventually, pull the old building down, after buying it, to enlarge the square.

The pillar we have mentioned, placed at the angle of two streets, was a treasure to the seekers for Limousin antiquities, on account of its lovely sculptured niche in which was a Virgin, mutilated during the Revolution. All visitors with archæological proclivities found traces of the stone sockets used to hold the candelabra in which public piety lighted tapers or placed its *ex-votos* and flowers.

At the farther end of the shop, a worm-eaten wooden staircase led to the two upper floors which were in turn surmounted by an attic. The house, backing against two adjoining houses, had no depth and derived all its light from the front and side windows. Each floor had two small chambers only, lighted by single windows, one looking out on the rue de la Cité, the other on the rue de la Vieille-Poste.

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In the middle-ages no artisan was better lodged. The house had evidently belonged in those times to makers of halberds and battle-axes, armorers in short, artificers whose work was not injured by exposure to the open air; for it was impossible to see clearly within, unless the iron shutters were raised from each side of the building; where were also two doors, one on either side of the corner pillar, as may be seen in many shops at the corners of streets. From the sill of each door — of fine stone worn by the tread of centuries — a low wall about three feet high began; in this wall was a groove or slot, repeated above in the beam by which the wall of each façade was supported. From time immemorial the heavy shutters had been rolled along these grooves, held there by enormous iron bars, while the doors were closed and secured in the same manner; so that these merchants and artificers could bar themselves into their houses as into a fortress.

Examining the interior, which, during the first twenty years of this century, was encumbered with old iron and brass, tires of wheels, springs, bells, anything in short which the destruction of buildings afforded of old metals, persons interested in the relics of the old town noticed signs of the flue of a forge, shown by a long trail of soot, — a minor detail which confirmed the conjecture of archæologists as to the original use to which the building was put. On the first floor (above the ground-floor) was one room and the kitchen; on the floor above that were two bedrooms. The garret was used to put away articles more choice and delicate than those that lay pell-mell about the shop.

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This house, hired in the first instance, was subsequently bought by a man named Sauviat, a hawker or peddler who, from 1786 to 1793, travelled the country over a radius of a hundred and fifty miles around Auvergne, exchanging crockery of a common kind, plates, dishes, glasses, — in short, the necessary articles of the poorest households, — for old iron, brass, and lead, or any metal under any shape it might lurk in. The Auvergnat would give, for instance, a brown earthenware saucepan worth two sous for a pound of lead, two pounds of iron, a broken spade or hoe or a cracked kettle; and being invariably the judge of his own cause, he did the weighing.

At the close of his third year Sauviat added the hawking of tin and copper ware to that of his pottery. In 1793 he was able to buy a château sold as part of the National domain, which he at once pulled to pieces. The profits were such that he repeated the process at several points of the sphere in which he operated; later, these first successful essays gave him the idea of proposing something of a like nature on a larger scale to one of his compatriots who lived in Paris. Thus it happened that the "Bande Noire," so celebrated for its devastations, had its birth in the brain of old Sauviat, the peddler, whom all Limoges afterward saw and knew for twenty-seven years in the rickety old shop among his cracked bells and rusty bars, chains and scales, his twisted leaden gutters, and metal rubbish of all kinds. We must do him the justice to say that he knew nothing of the celebrity or the extent of the association he originated; he profited by his own idea only in proportion to the capital he entrusted to the since famous firm of Brésac.

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Tired of frequenting fairs and roaming the country, the Auvergnat settled at Limoges, where he married, in 1797, the daughter of a coppersmith, a widower, named Champagnac. When his father-in-law died he bought the house in which he had been carrying on his trade of old-iron dealer, after ceasing to roam the country as a peddler. Sauviat was fifty years of age when he married old Champagnac's daughter, who was herself not less than thirty. Neither handsome nor pretty, she was nevertheless born in Auvergne, and the *patois* seemed to be the mutual attraction; also she had the sturdy frame which enables women to bear hard work. In the first three years of their married life Sauviat continued to do some peddling, and his wife accompanied him, carrying iron or lead on her back, and leading the miserable horse and cart full of crockery with which her husband plied a disguised usury. Dark-skinned, high-colored, enjoying robust health, and showing when she laughed a brilliant set of teeth, white, long, and broad as almonds, Madame Sauviat had the hips and bosom of a woman made by Nature expressly for maternity.

If this strong girl were not earlier married, the fault must be attributed to the Harpagon "no dowry" her father practised, though he never read Molière. Sauviat was not deterred by the lack of dowry; besides, a man of fifty can't make difficulties, not to speak of the fact that such a wife would save him the cost of a servant. He added nothing to the furniture of his bedroom, where, from the day of his wedding to the day he left the house, twenty years later, there was never anything but a single four-post bed, with valance and curtains of

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green serge, a chest, a bureau, four chairs, a table, and a looking-glass, all collected from different localities. The chest contained in its upper section pewter plates, dishes, etc., each article dissimilar from the rest. The kitchen can be imagined from the bedroom.

Neither husband nor wife knew how to read, — a slight defect of education which did not prevent them from ciphering admirably and doing a most flourishing business. Sauviat never bought any article without the certainty of being able to sell it for one hundred per cent profit. To relieve himself of the necessity of keeping books and accounts, he bought and sold for cash only. He had, moreover, such a perfect memory that the cost of any article, were it only a farthing, remained in his mind year after year, together with its accrued interest.

Except during the time required for her household duties, Madame Sauviat was always seated in a rickety wooden chair placed against the corner pillar of the building. There she knitted and looked at the passers, watched over the old iron, sold and weighed it, and received payment if Sauviat was away making purchases. When at home the husband could be heard at daybreak pushing open his shutters; the household dog rushed out into the street; and Madame Sauviat presently came out to help her man in spreading upon the natural counter made by the low walls on either side of the corner of the house on the two streets, the multifarious collection of bells, springs, broken gun-locks, and the other rubbish of their business, which gave a poverty-stricken look to the establishment, though it usually contained as much as twenty thou-

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sand francs' worth of lead, steel, iron, and other metals.

Never were the former peddler and his wife known to speak of their fortune; they concealed its amount as carefully as a criminal hides a crime; and for years they were suspected of shaving both gold and silver coins. When Champagnac died the Sauviats made no inventory of his property; but they rummaged, with the intelligence of rats, into every nook and corner of the old man's house, left it as naked as a corpse, and sold the wares it contained in their own shop.

Once a year, in December, Sauviat went to Paris in one of the public conveyances. The gossips of the neighborhood concluded that in order to conceal from others the amount of his fortune, he invested it himself on these occasions. It was known later that, having been connected in his youth with one of the most celebrated dealers in metal, an Auvergnat like himself, who was living in Paris, Sauviat placed his funds with the firm of Brésac, the mainspring and spine of that famous association known by the name of the "Bande Noire," which, as we have already said, took its rise from a suggestion made by Sauviat himself.

Sauviat was a fat little man with a weary face, endowed by Nature with a look of honesty which attracted customers and facilitated the sale of goods. His straightforward assertions, and the perfect indifference of his tone and manner, increased this impression. In person, his naturally ruddy complexion was hardly perceptible under the black metallic dust which powdered his curly black hair and the seams of a face pitted with the small-pox. His forehead was not with-

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out dignity; in fact, it resembled the well-known brow given by all painters to Saint Peter, the man of the people, the roughest, but withal the shrewdest, of the apostles. His hands were those of an indefatigable worker, — large, thick, square, and wrinkled with deep furrows. His chest was of seemingly indestructible muscularity. He never relinquished his peddler's costume, — thick, hobnailed shoes; blue stockings knit by his wife and hidden by leather gaiters; bottle-green velveteen trousers; a checked waistcoat, from which depended the brass key of his silver watch by an iron chain which long usage had polished till it shone like steel; a jacket with short tails, also of velveteen, like that of the trousers; and around his neck a printed cotton cravat much frayed by the rubbing of his beard.

On Sundays and fête-days Sauviat wore a frock-coat of maroon cloth, so well taken care of that two new ones were all he bought in twenty years. The living of galley-slaves would be thought sumptuous in comparison with that of the Sauviats, who never ate meat except on the great festivals of the Church. Before paying out the money absolutely needed for their daily subsistence, Madame Sauviat would feel in the two pockets hidden between her gown and petticoat, and bring forth a single well-scraped coin, — a crown of six francs, or perhaps a piece of fifty-five sous, — which she would gaze at for a long time before she could bring herself to change it. As a general thing the Sauviats ate herrings, dried peas, cheese, hard eggs in salad, vegetables seasoned in the cheapest manner. Never did they lay in provisions, except perhaps a

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bunch of garlic or onions, which could not spoil and cost but little. The small amount of wood they burned in winter they bought of itinerant sellers day by day. By seven in winter, by nine in summer, the household was in bed, and the shop was closed and guarded by a huge dog, which got its living from the kitchens in the neighborhood. Madame Sauviat used about three francs' worth of candles in the course of the year.

The sober, toilsome life of these persons was brightened by one joy, but that was a natural joy, and for it they made their only known outlays. In May, 1802, Madame Sauviat gave birth to a daughter. She was confined all alone, and went about her household work five days later. She nursed her child in the open air, seated as usual in her chair by the corner pillar, continuing to sell old iron while the infant sucked. Her milk cost nothing, and she let her little daughter feed on it for two years, neither of them being the worse for the long nursing.

Véronique (that was the infant's name) became the handsomest child in the Lower town, and every one who saw her stopped to look at her. The neighbors then noticed for the first time a trace of feeling in the old Sauviats, of which they had supposed them devoid. While the wife cooked the dinner the husband held the little one, or rocked it to the tune of an Auvergnat song. The workmen as they passed sometimes saw him motionless gazing at Véronique asleep on her mother's knees. He softened his harsh voice when he spoke to her, and wiped his hands on his trousers before taking her up. When Véronique tried to walk, the father bent his legs and stood at a little distance hold-

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ing out his arms and making little grimaces which contrasted funnily with the rigid furrows of his stern, hard face. The man of iron, brass, and lead became a being of flesh and blood and bones. If he happened to be standing with his back against the corner pillar motionless, a cry from Véronique would agitate him and send him flying over the mounds of iron fragments to find her; for she spent her childhood playing with the wreck of ancient castles heaped in the depths of that old shop. There were other days on which she went to play in the street or with the neighboring children; but even then her mother's eye was always on her.

It is not unimportant to say here that the Sauviats were eminently religious. At the very height of the Revolution they observed both Sunday and fête-days. Twice Sauviat came near having his head cut off for hearing mass from an unsworn priest. He was put in prison, being justly accused of helping a bishop, whose life he saved, to fly the country. Fortunately the old-iron dealer, who knew the ways of bolts and bars, was able to escape; nevertheless he was condemned to death by default, and as, by the bye, he never purged himself of that contempt, he may be said to have died dead.

His wife shared his piety. The avariciousness of the household yielded to the demands of religion. The old-iron dealers gave their alms punctually at the sacrament and to all the collections in church. When the vicar of Saint-Étienne called to ask help for his poor, Sauviat or his wife fetched at once without reluctance or sour faces the sum they thought their fair share of

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the parish duties. The mutilated Virgin on their corner pillar never failed (after 1799) to be wreathed with holly at Easter. In the summer season she was fêted with bouquets kept fresh in tumblers of blue glass; this was particularly the case after the birth of Véronique. On the days of the processions the Sauviats scrupulously hung their house with sheets covered with flowers, and contributed money to the erection and adornment of the altar, which was the pride and glory of the whole square.

Véronique Sauviat was, therefore, brought up in a Christian manner. From the time she was seven years old she was taught by a Gray sister from Auvergne to whom the Sauviats had done some kindness in former times. Both husband and wife were obliging when the matter did not affect their pockets or consume their time, — like all poor folk who are cordially ready to be serviceable to others in their own way. The Gray sister taught Véronique to read and write; she also taught her the history of the people of God, the catechism, the Old and the New Testaments, and a very little arithmetic. That was all; the worthy sister thought it enough; it was in fact too much.

At nine years of age Véronique surprised the whole neighborhood with her beauty. Every one admired her face, which promised much to the pencil of artists who are always seeking a noble ideal. She was called "the Little Virgin" and showed signs already of a fine figure and great delicacy of complexion. Her Madonna-like face — for the popular voice had well named her — was surrounded by a wealth of fair hair, which brought out the purity of her features. Whoever has seen the

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sublime Little Virgin of Titian in his great picture of the "Presentation," at Venice, will know what Véronique was in her girlhood, — the same ingenuous candor, the same seraphic astonishment in her eyes, the same simple yet noble attitude, the same majesty of childhood in her demeanor.

At eleven years of age she had the small-pox, and owed her life to the care of Sœur Marthe. During the two months that their child was in danger the Sauviats betrayed to the whole community the depth of their tenderness. Sauviat no longer went about the country to sales; he stayed in the shop, going upstairs and down to his daughter's room, sitting up with her every night in company with his wife. His silent anguish seemed so great that no one dared to speak to him; his neighbors looked at him with compassion, but they only asked news of Véronique from Sœur Marthe. During the days when the child's danger reached a crisis, the neighbors and passers saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, tears in his eyes and rolling down his hollow cheeks; he did not wipe them, but stood for hours as if stupefied, not daring to go upstairs to his daughter's room, gazing before him and seeing nothing, so oblivious of all things that any one might have robbed him.

Véronique was saved, but her beauty perished. Her face, once exquisitely colored with a tint in which brown and rose were harmoniously mingled, came out from the disease with a myriad of pits which thickened the skin, the flesh beneath it being deeply indented. Even her forehead did not escape the ravages of the scourge; it turned brown and looked as though it were

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hammered, like metal. Nothing can be more discordant than brick tones of the skin surrounded by golden hair; they destroy all harmony. These fissures in the tissues, capriciously hollowed, injured the purity of the profile and the delicacy of the lines of the face, especially that of the nose, the Grecian form of which was lost, and that of the chin, once as exquisitely rounded as a piece of white porcelain. The disease left nothing unharmed except the parts it was unable to reach, — the eyes and the teeth. She did not, however, lose the elegance and beauty of her shape, — neither the fulness of its lines nor the grace and suppleness of her waist. At fifteen Véronique was still a fine girl, and to the great consolation of her father and mother, a good and pious girl, busy, industrious, and domestic.

After her convalescence and after she had made her first communion, her parents gave her the two chambers on the second floor for her own particular dwelling. Sauviat, so coarse in his way of living for himself and his wife, now had certain perceptions of what comfort might be; a vague idea came to him of consoling his child for her great loss, which, as yet, she did not comprehend. The deprivation of that beauty which was once the pride and joy of these two beings made Véronique the more dear and precious to them. Sauviat came home one day, bearing a carpet he had chanced upon in some of his rounds, which he nailed himself on Véronique's floor. For her he saved from the sale of an old château the gorgeous bed of a fine lady, upholstered in red silk damask, with curtains and chairs of the same rich stuff. He furnished her two rooms with antique articles, of the true value of which

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he was wholly ignorant. He bought mignonette and put the pots on the ledge outside her window; and he returned from many of his trips with rose trees, or pansies, or any kind of flower which gardeners or tavern-keepers would give him.

If Véronique could have made comparisons and known the character, past habits, and ignorance of her parents she would have seen how much there was of affection in these little things; but as it was, she simply loved them from her own sweet nature and without reflection.

The girl wore the finest linen her mother could find in the shops. Madame Sauviat left her daughter at liberty to buy what materials she liked for her gowns and other garments; and the father and mother were proud of her choice, which was never extravagant. Véronique was satisfied with a blue silk gown for Sundays and fête-days, and on working-days she wore merino in winter and striped cotton dresses in summer. On Sundays she went to church with her father and mother, and took a walk after vespers along the banks of the Vienne or about the environs. On other days she stayed at home, busy in filling worsted-work patterns, the payment for which she gave to the poor, — a life of simple, chaste, and exemplary principles and habits. She did some reading together with her tapestry, but never in any books except those lent to her by the vicar of Saint-Étienne, a priest whom Sœur Marthe had first made known to her parents.

All the rules of the Sauviat's domestic economy were suspended in favor of Véronique. Her mother delighted in giving her dainty things to eat, and cooked

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ner food separately. The father and mother still ate their nuts and dry bread, their herrings and parched peas fricasseed in salt butter, while for Véronique nothing was thought too choice and good.

"Véronique must cost you a pretty penny," said a hatmaker who lived opposite to the Sauviats and had designs on their daughter for his son, estimating the fortune of the old-iron dealer at a hundred thousand francs.

"Yes, neighbor, yes," père Sauviat would say; "if she asked me for ten crowns I'd let her have them. She has all she wants; but she never asks for anything; she is as gentle as a lamb."

Véronique was, as a matter of fact, absolutely ignorant of the value of things. She had never wanted for anything; she never saw a piece of gold till the day of her marriage; she had no money of her own; her mother bought and gave her everything she needed and wished for; so that even when she wanted to give alms to a beggar, the girl felt in her mother's pocket for the coin.

"If that's so," remarked the hatmaker, "she can't cost you much."

"So you think, do you?" replied Sauviat. "You wouldn't get off under forty crowns a year, I can tell you that. Why, her room, she has at least a hundred crowns' worth of furniture in it! But when a man has but one child, you know, he doesn't mind. The little we own will all go to her."

"The little! Why, you must be rich, père Sauviat! It is pretty nigh forty years that you have been doing a business in which there are no losses."

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"Ha! I sha'n't go to the poorhouse for want of a thousand francs or so!" replied the old-iron dealer.

From the day when Véronique lost the soft beauty which made her girlish face the admiration of all who saw it, Père Sauviat redoubled in activity. His business became so prosperous that he now went to Paris several times a year. Every one felt that he wanted to compensate his daughter by force of money for what he called her "loss of profit." When Véronique was fifteen years old a change was made in the internal manners and customs of the household. The father and mother went upstairs in the evenings to their daughter's apartment, where Véronique would read to them, by the light of a lamp placed behind a glass globe full of water, the "Vie des Saints," the "Lettres Édifiantes," and other books lent by the vicar. Madame Sauviat knitted stockings, feeling that she thus recouped herself for the cost of oil. The neighbors could see through the window the old couple seated motionless in their armchairs, like Chinese images, listening to their daughter, and admiring her with all the powers of their contracted minds, obtuse to everything that was not business or religious faith.

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## II.

### VÉRONIQUE.

THERE are, no doubt, many young girls in the world as pure as Véronique, but none purer or more modest. Her confessions must have surprised the angels and rejoiced the Blessed Virgin.

At sixteen years of age she was fully developed, and appeared the woman she was eventually to become. She was of medium height, neither her father nor her mother being tall; but her figure was charming in its graceful suppleness, and in the serpentine curves laboriously sought by painters and sculptors, — curves which Nature herself draws so delicately with her lissom outlines, revealed to the eye of artists in spite of swathing linen and thick clothes, which mould themselves, inevitably, upon the nude. Sincere, simple, and natural, Véronique set these beauties of her form into relief by movements that were wholly free from affectation. She brought out her "full and complete effect," if we may borrow that strong term from legal phraseology. She had the plump arms of the Auvergnat women, the red and dimpled hand of a barmaid, and her strong but well-shaped feet were in keeping with the rest of her figure.

At times there seemed to pass within her a marvellous and delightful phenomenon which promised to Love



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a woman concealed thus far from every eye. This phenomenon was perhaps one cause of the admiration her father and mother felt for her beauty, which they often declared to be divine, — to the great astonishment of their neighbors. The first to remark it were the priests of the cathedral and the worshippers with her at the same altar. When a strong emotion took possession of Véronique, — and the religious exaltation to which she yielded herself on receiving the communion must be counted among the strongest emotions of so pure and candid a young creature, — an inward light seemed to efface for the moment all traces of the small-pox. The pure and radiant face of her childhood reappeared in its pristine beauty. Though slightly veiled by the thickened surface disease had laid there, it shone with the mysterious brilliancy of a flower blooming beneath the water of the sea when the sun is penetrating it. Véronique was changed for a few moments; the Little Virgin reappeared and then disappeared again, like a celestial vision. The pupils of her eyes, gifted with the power of great expansion, widened until they covered the whole surface of the blue iris except for a tiny circle. Thus the metamorphose of the eye, which became as keen and vivid as that of an eagle, completed the extraordinary change in the face. Was it the storm of restrained passions; was it some power coming from the depths of the soul, which enlarged the pupils in full daylight as they sometimes in other eyes enlarge by night, darkening the azure of those celestial orbs?

However that may be, it was impossible to look indifferently at Véronique as she returned to her seat

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from the altar where she had united herself with God, — a moment when she appeared to all the parish in her primitive splendor. At such moments her beauty eclipsed that of the most beautiful of women. What a charm was there for the man who loved her, guarding jealously that veil of flesh which hid the woman's soul from every eye, — a veil which the hand of love might lift for an instant and then let drop over conjugal delights! Véronique's lips were faultlessly curved and painted in the clear vermilion of her pure warm blood. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little heavy, in the acceptation given by painters to that term, — a heaviness which is, according to the relentless laws of physiogonomy, the indication of an almost morbid vehemence in passion. She had above her brow, which was finely modelled and almost imperious, a magnificent diadem of hair, voluminous, redundant, and now of a chestnut color.

From the age of sixteen to the day of her marriage Véronique's bearing was always thoughtful, and sometimes melancholy. Living in such deep solitude, she was forced, like other solitary persons, to examine and consider the spectacle of that which went on within her, — the progress of her thought, the variety of the images in her mind, and the scope of feelings warmed and nurtured in a life so pure.

Those who looked up from their lower level as they passed along the rue de la Cité might have seen, on all fine days, the daughter of the Sauviats sitting at her open window, sewing, embroidering, or pricking the needle through the canvas of her worsted-work, with a look that was often dreamy. Her head was

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vividly defined among the flowers which poetized the brown and crumbling sills of her casement windows with their leaded panes. Sometimes the reflection of the red damask window-curtains added to the effect of that head, already so highly colored; like a crimson flower she glowed in the aerial garden so carefully trained upon her window-sill.

The quaint old house possessed therefore something more quaint than itself, — the portrait of a young girl worthy of Mieris, or Van Ostade, or Terburg, or Gerard Douw, framed in one of those old, defaced, half ruined windows the brushes of the old Dutch painters loved so well. When some stranger, surprised or interested by the building, stopped before it and gazed at the second story, old Sauviat would poke his head beyond the overhanging projection, certain that he should see his daughter at her window. Then he would retreat into the shop rubbing his hands and saying to his wife in the Auvergne vernacular : —

" Hey ! old woman ; they 're admiring your daughter ! "

In 1820 an incident occurred in the simple uneventful life the girl was leading, which might have had no importance in the life of any other young woman, but which, in point of fact, did no doubt exercise over Véronique's future a terrible influence.

On one of the suppressed church fête-days, when many persons went about their daily labor, though the Sauviats scrupulously closed their shop, attended mass, and took a walk, Véronique passed, on their way to the fields, a bookseller's stall on which lay a copy of "Paul and Virginia." She had a fancy to buy it for the sake of the engraving, and her father paid a hun-

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dred sous for the fatal volume, which he put into the pocket of his coat.

"Would n't it be well to show that book to Monsieur le vicaire before you read it?" said her mother, to whom all printed books were a sealed mystery.

"I thought of it," answered Véronique.

The girl passed the whole night reading the story, — one of the most touching bits of writing in the French language. The picture of mutual love, half Biblical and worthy of the earlier ages of the world, ravaged her heart. A hand — was it divine or devilish? — raised the veil which, till then, had hidden nature from her. The Little Virgin still existing in the beautiful young girl thought on the morrow that her flowers had never been so beautiful; she heard their symbolic language, she looked into the depths of the azure sky with a fixedness that was almost ecstasy, and tears without a cause rolled down her cheeks.

In the life of all women there comes a moment when they comprehend their destiny, — when their hitherto mute organization speaks peremptorily. It is not always a man, chosen by some furtive involuntary glance, who awakens their slumbering sixth sense; oftener it is some unexpected sight, the aspect of scenery, the *coup d'œil* of religious pomp, the harmony of nature's perfumes, a rosy dawn veiled in slight mists, the winning notes of some divinest music, or indeed any unexpected motion within the soul or within the body. To this lonely girl, buried in that old house, brought up by simple, half rustic parents, who had never heard an unfit word, whose pure unsullied mind had never known the slightest evil thought, — to the angelic pupil

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of Sœur Marthe and the vicar of Saint-Étienne the revelation of love, the life of womanhood, came from the hand of genius through one sweet book. To any other mind that book would have offered no danger; to her it was worse in its effects than an obscene tale. Corruption is relative. There are chaste and virgin natures which a single thought corrupts, doing all the more harm because no thought of the duty of resistance has occurred.

The next day Véronique showed the book to the good priest, who approved the purchase; for what could be more childlike and innocent and pure than the history of Paul and Virginia? But the warmth of the tropics, the beauty of the scenery, the almost puerile innocence of a love that seemed so sacred had done their work on Véronique. She was led by the sweet and noble achievement of its author to the worship of the Ideal, that fatal human religion! She dreamed of a lover like Paul. Her thoughts caressed the voluptuous image of that balmy isle. Childlike, she named an island in the Vienne, below Limoges and nearly opposite to the Faubourg Saint-Martial, the Île de France. Her mind lived there in the world of fancy all young girls construct, — a world they enrich with their own perfections. She spent long hours at her window, looking at the artisans or the mechanics who passed it, the only men whom the modest position of her parents allowed her to think of. Accustomed, of course, to the idea of eventually marrying a man of the people, she now became aware of instincts within herself which revolted from all coarseness.

In such a situation she naturally made many a

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romance such as young girls are fond of weaving. She clasped the idea — perhaps with the natural ardor of a noble and virgin imagination — of ennobling one of those men, and of raising him to the height where her own dreams led her. She may have made a Paul of some young man who caught her eye, merely to fasten her wild ideas to an actual being, as the mists of a damp atmosphere, touched by frost, crystallize on the branches of a tree by the wayside. She must have flung herself deep into the abysses of her dream, for though she often returned bearing on her brow, as if from vast heights, some luminous reflections, oftener she seemed to carry in her hand the flowers that grew beside a torrent she had followed down a precipice.

On the warm summer evenings she would ask her father to take her on his arm to the banks of the Vienne, where she went into ecstasies over the beauties of the sky and fields, the glories of the setting sun, or the infinite sweetness of the dewy evening. Her soul exhaled itself thenceforth in a fragrance of natural poesy. Her hair, until then simply wound about her head, she now curled and braided. Her dress showed some research. The vine which was running wild and naturally among the branches of the old elm, was transplanted, cut and trained over a green and pretty trellis.

After the return of old Sauviat (then seventy years of age) from a trip to Paris in December, 1822, the vicar came to see him one evening, and after a few insignificant remarks he said suddenly: —

"You had better think of marrying your daughter, Sauviat. At your age you ought not to put off the accomplishment of so important a duty."

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"But is Véronique willing to be married?" asked the old man, startled.

"As you please, father," she said, lowering her eyes.

"Yes, we'll marry her!" cried stout Madame Sauviat, smiling.

"Why did n't you speak to me about it before I went to Paris, mother?" said Sauviat. "I shall have to go back there."

Jérôme-Baptiste Sauviat, a man in whose eyes money seemed to constitute the whole of happiness, who knew nothing of love, and had never seen in marriage anything but the means of transmitting property to another self, had long sworn to marry Véronique to some rich bourgeois, — so long, in fact, that the idea had assumed in his brain the characteristics of a hobby. His neighbor, the hat-maker, who possessed about two thousand francs a year, had already asked, on behalf of his son, to whom he proposed to give up his hat-making establishment, the hand of a girl so well known in the neighborhood for her exemplary conduct and Christian principles. Sauviat had politely refused, without saying anything to Véronique. The day after the vicar — a very important personage in the eyes of the Sauviat household — had mentioned the necessity of marrying Véronique, whose confessor he was, the old man shaved and dressed himself as for a fête-day, and went out without saying a word to his wife or daughter; both knew very well, however, that the father was in search of a son-in-law. Old Sauviat went to Monsieur Graslin.

Monsieur Graslin, a rich banker in Limoges, had,

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like Sauviat himself, started from Auvergne without a penny; he came to Limoges to be a porter, found a place as office-boy in a financial house, and there, like many other financiers, he made his way by dint of economy, and also through fortunate circumstances. Cashier at twenty-five years of age, partner ten years later, in the firm of Perret and Grossetête, he ended by finding himself the head of the house, after buying out the senior partners, both of whom retired into the country, leaving him their funds to manage in the business at a low interest.

Pierre Graslin, then forty-seven years of age, was supposed to possess about six hundred thousand francs. The estimate of his fortune had lately increased throughout the department, in consequence of his outlay in having built, in a new quarter of the town called the place d'Arbres (thus assisting to give Limoges an improved aspect), a fine house, the front of it being on a line with a public building with the façade of which it corresponded. This house had now been finished six months, but Pierre Graslin delayed furnishing it; it had cost him so much that he shrank from the further expense of living in it. His vanity had led him to transgress the wise laws by which he governed his life. He felt, with the good sense of a business man, that the interior of the house ought to correspond with the character of the outside. The furniture, silver-ware, and other needful accessories to the life he would have to lead in his new mansion would, he estimated, cost him nearly as much as the original building. In spite, therefore, of the gossip of tongues and the charitable suppositions of his neighbors, he continued to live on

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in the damp, old, and dirty ground-floor apartment in the rue Montantmanigne where his fortune had been made. The public carped, but Graslin had the approval of his former partners, who praised a resolution that was somewhat uncommon.

A fortune and a position like those of Pierre Graslin naturally excited the greed of not a few in a small provincial city. During the last ten years more than one proposition of marriage had been intimated to Monsieur Graslin. But the bachelor state was so well suited to a man who was busy from morning till night, overrun with work, eager in the pursuit of money as a hunter for game, and always tired out with his day's labor, that Graslin fell into none of the traps laid for him by ambitious mothers who coveted so brilliant a position for their daughters.

Graslin, another Sauviat in an upper sphere, did not spend more than forty sous a day, and clothed himself no better than his under-clerk. Two clerks and an office-boy sufficed him to carry on his business, which was immense through the multiplicity of its details. One clerk attended to the correspondence; the other had charge of the accounts; but Pierre Graslin was himself the soul, and body too, of the whole concern. His clerks, chosen from his own relations, were safe men, intelligent and as well-trained in the work as himself. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a truck horse, — up at five in the morning at all seasons, and never getting to bed before eleven at night.

Graslin employed a charwoman by the day, an old peasant from Auvergne, who did his cooking. The

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brown earthenware off which he ate, and the stout coarse linen which he used, were in keeping with the character of his food. The old woman had strict orders never to spend more than three francs daily for the total expenses of the household. The office-boy was also man-of-all-work. The clerks took care of their own rooms. The tables of blackened wood, the straw chairs half unseated, the wretched beds, the counters and desks, in short, the whole furniture of house and office was not worth more than a thousand francs, including a colossal iron safe, built into the wall, before which slept the man-of-all-work with two dogs at his feet.

Graslin did not often go into society, which, however, discussed him constantly. Two or three times a year he dined with the receiver-general, with whom his business brought him into constant intercourse. He also occasionally took a meal at the prefecture; for he had been appointed, much to his regret, a member of the Council-general of the department — "a waste of time," he remarked. Sometimes his brother bankers with whom he had dealings kept him to breakfast or dinner; and he was forced also to visit his former partners, who spent their winters in Limoges. He cared so little to keep up his relations to society that in twenty-five years Graslin had not offered so much as a glass of water to any one. When he passed along the street persons would nudge each other and say: "That's Monsieur Graslin;" meaning, "There's a man who came to Limoges without a penny and has now acquired an enormous fortune." The Auvergnat banker was a model which more than one father

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pointed out to his son, and wives had been known to fling him in the faces of their husbands.

We can now understand the reasons that led a man who had become the pivot of the financial machine of Limoges to repulse the various propositions of marriage which parents never ceased to make to him. The daughters of his partners, Messrs. Perret and Grossetête, were married before Graslin was in a position to take a wife; but as each of these ladies had young daughters, the wiseheads of the community finally concluded that old Perret or old Grossetête had made an arrangement with Graslin to wait for one of his granddaughters, and thenceforth they let him alone.

Sauviat had watched the ascending career of his compatriot more attentively and seriously than any one else. He had known him from the time he first came to Limoges; but their respective positions had changed so much, at least apparently, that their friendship, now become merely superficial, was seldom freshened. Still, in his relation as compatriot, Graslin never disdained to talk with Sauviat when they chanced to meet. Both continued to keep up their early *tutoiement*, but only in their native dialect. When the receiver-general of Bourges, the youngest of the brothers Grossetête, married his daughter in 1823 to the youngest son of Comte Fontaine, Sauviat felt sure that the Grossetêtes would never allow Graslin to enter their family.

After his conference with the banker, Père Sauviat returned home joyously. He dined that night in his daughter's room, and after dinner he said to his womenkind: —

"Véronique will be Madame Graslin."

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"Madame Graslin!" exclaimed Mère Sauviat, astounded.

"Is it possible?" said Véronique, to whom Graslin was personally unknown, and whose imagination regarded him very much as a Parisian grisette would regard a Rothschild.

"Yes, it is settled," said old Sauviat solemnly. "Graslin will furnish his house magnificently; he is to give our daughter a fine Parisian carriage and the best horses to be found in the Limousin; he will buy an estate worth five hundred thousand francs, and settle that and his town-house upon her. Véronique will be the first lady in Limoges, the richest in the department, and she can do what she pleases with Graslin."

Véronique's education, her religious ideas, and her boundless affection for her parents, prevented her from making a single objection; it did not even cross her mind to think that she had been disposed of without reference to her own will. On the morrow Sauviat went to Paris, and was absent for nearly a week.

Pierre Graslin was, as can readily be imagined, not much of a talker; he went straight and rapidly to deeds. A thing decided on was a thing done. In February, 1822, a strange piece of news burst like a thunderbolt on the town of Limoges. The hôtel Graslin was being handsomely furnished; carriers' carts came day after day from Paris, and their contents were unpacked in the courtyard. Rumors flew about the town as to the beauty and good taste of the modern or the antique furniture as it was seen to arrive. The great firm of Odiot and Company sent down a magnificent service of plate by the mail-coach. Three carriages, a

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calèche, a coupé, and a cabriolet arrived, wrapped in straw with as much care as if they were jewels.

"Monsieur Graslin is going to be married!"

These words were said by every pair of lips in Limoges in the course of a single evening, — in the salons of the upper classes, in the kitchens, in the shops, in the streets, in the suburbs, and before long throughout the whole surrounding country. But to whom? No one could answer. Limoges had a mystery.

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## III.

### MARRIAGE.

On the return of old Sauviat Graslin paid his first evening visit at half-past nine o'clock. Véronique was expecting him, dressed in her blue silk gown and muslin guimpe, over which fell a collaret made of lawn with a deep hem. Her hair was simply worn in two smooth bandeaus, gathered into a Grecian knot at the back of her head. She was seated on a tapestried chair beside her mother, who occupied a fine armchair with a carved back, covered with red velvet (evidently the relic of some old château), which stood beside the fireplace. A bright fire blazed on the hearth. On the chimney-piece, at either side of an antique clock, the value of which was wholly unknown to the Sauviats, six wax candles in two brass sconces twisted like vine-shoots, lighted the dark room and Véronique in all her budding prime. The old mother was wearing her best gown.

From the silent street, at that tranquil hour, through the soft shadows of the ancient stairway, Graslin appeared to the modest, artless Véronique, her mind still dwelling on the sweet ideas which Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had given her of love.

Graslin, who was short and thin, had thick black hair like the bristles of a brush, which brought into vigorous relief a face as red as that of a drunkard

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emeritus, and covered with suppurating pimples, either bleeding or about to burst. Without being caused by eczema or scrofula, these signs of a blood overheated by continual toil, anxiety, and the lust of business, by wakeful nights, poor food, and a sober life, seemed to partake of both those diseases. In spite of the advice of his partners, his clerks, and his physician, the banker would never compel himself to take the healthful precautions which might have prevented, or would at least modify, this malady, which was slight at first, but had greatly increased from year to year. He wanted to cure it, and would sometimes take baths or drink some prescribed potion; but, hurried along on the current of his business, he soon neglected the care of his person. Sometimes he thought of suspending work for a time, travelling about, and visiting the noted baths for such diseases; but where is the hunter after millions who is willing to stop short?

In that blazing face shone two gray eyes rayed with green lines starting from the pupils, and speckled with brown spots, — two implacable eyes, full of resolution, rectitude, and shrewd calculation. Graslin's nose was short and turned up; he had a mouth with thick lips, a prominent forehead, and high cheek-bones, coarse ears with large edges discolored by the condition of his blood, — in short, he was an ancient satyr in a black satin waistcoat, brown frock-coat, and white cravat. His strong and vigorous shoulders, which began life by bearing heavy burdens, were now rather bent; and beneath this torso, unduly developed, came a pair of weak legs, rather badly affixed to the short thighs. His thin and hairy hands had the crooked

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fingers of those whose business it is to handle money. The habit of quick decision could be seen in the way the eyebrows rose into a point over each arch of the eye. Though the mouth was grave and pinched, its expression was that of inward kindliness; it told of an excellent nature, sunk in business, smothered possibly, though it might revive by contact with a woman.

At this apparition Véronique's heart was violently agitated; blackness came before her eyes; she thought she cried aloud; but she really sat there mute, with fixed and staring gaze.

"Véronique, this is Monsieur Graslin," said old Sauviat.

Véronique rose, curtsied, dropped back into her chair, and looked at her mother, who was smiling at the millionnaire, seeming, as did her father, so happy, — so happy that the poor girl found strength to hide her surprise and her violent repulsion. During the conversation which then took place something was said of Graslin's health. The banker looked naively into the mirror, with bevelled edges in an ebony frame.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am not good-looking."

Thereupon he proceeded to explain the blotches on his face as the result of his overworked life. He related how he had constantly disobeyed his physician's advice; and remarked that he hoped to change his appearance altogether when he had a wife to rule his household, and take better care of him than he took of himself.

"Is a man married for his face, compatriot?" said Sauviat, giving the other a hearty slap on the thigh.



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Graslin's speech went straight to those natural feelings which, more or less, fill the heart of every woman. The thought came into Véronique's mind that her face, too, had been destroyed by a horrible disease, and her Christian modesty rebuked her first impression.

Hearing a whistle in the street, Graslin went downstairs, followed by Sauviat. They speedily returned. The office-boy had brought the first bouquet, which was a little late in coming. When the banker exhibited this mound of exotic flowers, the fragrance of which completely filled the room, and offered it to his future wife, Véronique felt a rush of conflicting emotions; she was suddenly plunged into the ideal and fantastic world of tropical nature. Never before had she seen white camellias, never had she smelt the fragrance of the Alpine cistus, the Cape jessamine, the cedronella, the volcameria, the moss-rose, or any of the divine perfumes which woo to love, and sing to the heart their hymns of fragrance. Graslin left Véronique that night in the grasp of such emotions.

From this time forth, as soon as all Limoges was sleeping, the banker would slip along the walls to the Sauviats' house. There he would tap gently on the window-shutter; the dog did not bark; old Sauviat came down and let him in, and Graslin would then spend an hour or two with Véronique in the brown room, where Madame Sauviat always served him a true Auvergnat supper. Never did this singular lover arrive without a bouquet made of the rarest flowers from the greenhouse of his old partner, Monsieur Grossetête, the only person who as yet knew of the approaching marriage. The man-of-all-work went every

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evening to fetch the bunch, which Monsieur Grossetête made himself.

Graslin made about fifty such visits in two months; each time, beside the flowers, he brought with him some rich present, — rings, a watch, a gold chain, a work-box, etc. These inconceivable extravagances must be explained, and a word suffices. Véronique's dowry, promised by her father, consisted of nearly the whole of old Sauviat's property, namely, seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man retained an income of eight thousand francs derived from the Funds, bought for him originally for sixty thousand francs in assignats by his correspondent Brézac, to whom, at the time of his imprisonment, he had confided that sum, and who kept it for him safely. These sixty thousand francs in assignats were the half of Sauviat's fortune at the time he came so near being guillotined. Brézac was also, at the same time, the faithful repository of the rest, namely, seven hundred louis d'or (an enormous sum at that time in gold), with which old Sauviat began his business once more as soon as he recovered his liberty. In thirty years each of those louis d'or had been transformed into a bank-note for a thousand francs, by means of the income from the Funds, of Madame Sauviat's inheritance from her father, old Champagnac, and of the profits accruing from the business and the accumulated interest thereon in the hands of the Brézac firm. Brézac himself had a loyal and honest friendship for Sauviat, — such as all Auvergnats are apt to feel for one another.

So, whenever Sauviat passed the front of the Graslin mansion he had said to himself, "Véronique shall live

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in that fine palace." He knew very well that no girl in all the department would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs as a marriage portion, besides the expectation of two hundred and fifty thousand more. Graslin, his chosen son-in-law, would therefore infallibly marry Véronique; and so, as we have seen, it came about.

Every evening Véronique had her fresh bunch of flowers, which on the morrow decked her little salon and was carefully concealed from the neighbors. She admired the beautiful jewels, the pearls and diamonds, the bracelets, the rubies, gifts which assuredly gratify all the daughters of Eve. She thought herself less plain when she wore them. She saw her mother happy in the marriage, and she had no other point of view from which to make comparisons. She was, moreover, totally ignorant of the duties or the purpose of marriage. She heard the solemn voice of the vicar of Saint-Étienne praising Graslin to her as a man of honor, with whom she would lead an honorable life. Thus it was that Véronique consented to receive Monsieur Graslin as her future husband.

When it happens that in a life so withdrawn from the world, so solitary as that of Véronique, a single person enters it every day, that person cannot long remain indifferent; either he is hated, and the aversion, justified by a deepening knowledge of his character, renders him intolerable, or the habit of seeing bodily defects dims the eye to them. The mind looks about for compensations; his countenance awakens curiosity; its features brighten; fleeting beauties appear in it. At last the inner, hidden beneath the outer, shows itself. Then, when first impressions are fairly over-

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come, the attachment felt is all the stronger, because the soul clings to it as its own creation. That is love. And here lies the reason of those passions conceived by beautiful beings for other beings apparently ugly. The outward aspect, forgotten by affection, is no longer seen in a creature whose soul is deeply valued. Besides this, beauty, so necessary to a woman, takes many strange aspects in man; and there is as much diversity of feeling among women about the beauty of men as there is among men about the beauty of women. So, after deep reflection and much debating with herself, Véronique gave her consent to the publication of the banns.

From that moment all Limoges rang with this inexplicable affair, — inexplicable because no one knew the secret of it, namely, the immensity of the dowry. Had that dowry been known Véronique could have chosen a husband where she pleased; but even so, she might have made a mistake.

Graslin was thought to be much in love. Upholsterers came from Paris to fit up the house. Nothing was talked of in Limoges but the profuse expenditures of the banker. The value of the chandeliers was calculated; the gilding of the walls, the figures on the clocks, all were discussed; the jardinières, the calorifères, the objects of luxury and novelty, nothing was left unnoticed. In the garden of the hôtel Graslin, above the icehouse, was an aviary, and all the inhabitants of the town were presently surprised by the sight of rare birds, — Chinese pheasants, mysterious breeds of ducks. Every one flocked to see them. Monsieur and Madame Grossetête, an old couple who were highly

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respected in Limoges, made several visits to the Sauviats, accompanied by Graslin. Madame Grossetête, a most excellent woman, congratulated Véronique on her happy marriage. Thus the Church, the family, society, and all material things down to the most trivial, made themselves accomplices to bring about this marriage.

In the month of April the formal invitations to the wedding were issued to all Graslin's friends and acquaintance. On a fine spring morning a calèche and a coupé, drawn by Limousin horses chosen by Monsieur Grossetête, drew up at eleven o'clock before the shop of the iron-dealer, bringing, to the great excitement of the neighborhood, the former partners of the bridegroom and the latter's two clerks. The street was lined with spectators, all anxious to see the Sauviats' daughter, on whose beautiful hair the most renowned hairdresser in Limoges had placed the bridal wreath and a costly veil of English lace. Véronique wore a gown of simple white muslin. A rather imposing assemblage of the most distinguished women in the society of the town attended the wedding in the cathedral, where the bishop, knowing the religious fervor of the Sauviats, deigned to marry Véronique himself. The bride was very generally voted plain.

She entered her new house, and went from one surprise to another. A grand dinner was to precede the ball, to which Graslin had invited nearly all Limoges. The dinner, given to the bishop, the prefect, the judge of the court, the attorney-general, the mayor, the general, and Graslin's former partners with their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all other per-

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*"The street was lined with spectators, all anxious to see the Sauviats' daughter."*

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sons who are simple and natural, showed charms that were not expected in her. Neither of the bridal pair could dance; Véronique continued therefore to do the honors to her guests, and to win the esteem and good graces of nearly all the persons who were presented to her, asking Grossetête, who took an honest liking to her, for information about the company. She made no mistakes and committed no blunders. It was during this evening that the two former partners of the banker announced the amount of the dowry (immense for Limousin) given by the Sauviats to their daughter. At nine o'clock the old iron-dealer returned home and went to bed, leaving his wife to preside over the bride's retiring. It was said by every one throughout the town that Madame Graslin was very plain, though well made.

Old Sauviat now wound up his business and sold his house in town. He bought a little country-place on the left bank of the Vienne between Limoges and Cluzeau, ten minutes' walk from the suburb of Saint-Martial, where he intended to finish his days tranquilly with his wife. The old couple had an apartment in the hôtel Graslin and always dined once or twice a week with their daughter, who, as often, made their house in the country the object of her walks.

This enforced rest almost killed old Sauviat. Happily, Graslin found a means of occupying his father-in-law. In 1823 the banker was forced to take possession of a porcelain manufactory, to the proprietors of which he had advanced large sums, which they found themselves unable to repay except by the sale of their factory, which they made to him. By the help of his

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business connections and by investing a large amount of property in the concern, Graslin made it one of the finest manufactories of Limoges ware in the town. Afterwards he resold it at a fine profit; meantime he placed it under the superintendence of his father-in-law, who, in spite of his seventy-two years, counted for much in the return of prosperity to the establishment, who himself renewed his youth in the employment. Graslin was then able to attend to his legitimate business of banking without anxiety as to the manufactory.

Sauviat died in 1827 from an accident. While taking account of stock he fell into a *charasse*, — a sort of crate with an open grating in which the china was packed; his leg was slightly injured, so slightly that he paid no attention to it; gangrene set in; he would not consent to amputation, and therefore died. The widow gave up about two hundred and fifty thousand francs which came to her from Sauviat's estate, reserving only a stipend of two hundred francs a month, which amply sufficed for her wants. Graslin bound himself to pay her that sum duly. She kept her little house in the country, and lived there alone without a servant and against the remonstrances of her daughter, who could not induce her to alter this determination, to which she clung with the obstinacy peculiar to old persons. Madame Sauviat came nearly every day into Limoges to see her daughter, and the latter still continued to make her mother's house, from which was a charming view of the river, the object of her walks. From the road leading to it could be seen that island long loved by Véronique and called by her the Île de France.

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In order not to complicate our history of the Graslin household with the foregoing incidents, we have thought it best to end that of the Sauviats by anticipating events, which are moreover useful as explaining the private and hidden life which Madame Graslin now led. The old mother, noticing that Graslin's miserliness, which returned upon him, might hamper her daughter, was for some time unwilling to resign the property left to her by her husband. But Véronique, unable to imagine a case in which a woman might desire the use of her own property, urged it upon her mother with reasons of great generosity, and out of gratitude to Graslin for restoring to her the liberty and freedom of a young girl. But this is anticipating.

The unusual splendor which accompanied Graslin's marriage had disturbed all his habits and constantly annoyed him. The mind of the great financier was a very small one. Véronique had had no means of judging the man with whom she was to pass her life. During his fifty-five visits he had let her see nothing but the business man, the indefatigable worker, who conceived and sustained great enterprises, and analyzed public affairs, bringing them always to the crucial test of the Bank. Fascinated by the million offered to him by Sauviat, he showed himself generous by calculation. Carried away by the interests of his marriage and by what he called his "folly," namely, the house which still goes by the name of the hôtel Graslin, he did things on a large scale. Having bought horses, a calèche, and a coupé, he naturally used them to return the wedding visits and go to those dinners and balls, called the "retours de noces," which the heads of the

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administration and the rich families of Limoges gave to the newly married pair. Under this impulsion, which carried him entirely out of his natural sphere, Graslin sent to Paris for a man-cook and took a reception day. For a year he kept the pace of a man who possesses a fortune of sixteen hundred thousand francs, and he became of course the most noted personage in Limoges. During this year he generously put into his wife's purse every month twenty-five gold pieces of twenty francs each.

Society concerned itself much about Véronique from the day of her marriage, for she was a boon to its curiosity, which has little to feed on in the provinces. Véronique was all the more studied because she had appeared in the social world like a phenomenon; but once there, she remained always simple and modest, in the attitude of a person who is observing habits, customs, manners, things unknown to her, and endeavoring to conform to them. Already voted ugly but well-shaped, she was now declared kindly but stupid. She was learning so many things, she had so much to hear and to see that her looks and speech did certainly give some reason for this judgment. She showed a sort of torpor which resembled lack of mind. Marriage, that hard calling, as she said, for which the Church, the Code, and her mother exhorted her to resignation and obedience, under pain of transgressing all human laws and causing irreparable evil, threw her into a dazed and dizzy condition, which amounted sometimes to a species of inward delirium.

Silent and self-contained, she listened as much to herself as she did to others. Feeling within her the

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most violent "difficulty of existing," to use an expression of Fontenelle's, which was constantly increasing, she became terrified at herself. Nature resisted the commands of the mind, the body denied the will. The poor creature, caught in the net, wept on the breast of that great Mother of the poor and the afflicted, — she went for comfort to the Church; her piety redoubled, she confided the assaults of the demon to her confessor; she prayed to heaven for succor. Never, at any period of her life, did she fulfil her religious duties with such fervor. The despair of not loving her husband flung her violently at the foot of the altar, where divine and consolatory voices urged her to patience. She was patient, she was gentle, and she continued to live on, hoping always for the happiness of maternity.

"Did you notice Madame Graslin this morning?" the women would say to each other. "Marriage does n't agree with her; she is actually green."

"Yes," some of them would reply; "but would you have given your daughter to a man like Graslin? No woman could marry him with impunity."

Now that Graslin was married, all the mothers who had courted him for ten years past pursued him with sarcasms.

Véronique grew visibly thinner and really ugly; her eyes looked weary, her features coarsened, her manner was shy and awkward; she acquired that air of cold and melancholy rigidity for which the ultra-pious are so often blamed. Her skin took on a grayish tone; she dragged herself languidly about during this first year of married life, ordinarily so brilliant for a young wife. She tried to divert her mind by reading, profit-

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ing by the liberty of married women to read what they please. She read the novels of Walter Scott, the poems of Lord Byron, the works of Schiller and of Goethe, and much else of modern and also ancient literature. She learned to ride a horse, to dance and to draw. She painted water-colors and made sepia sketches, turning ardently to all those resources which women employ to bear the weariness of their solitude. She gave herself that second education which most women derive from a man, but which she derived from herself only.

The natural superiority of a free, sincere spirit, brought up as it were in a desert and strengthened by religion, had given her a sort of untrammelled grandeur and certain needs, to which the provincial world she lived in offered no sustenance. All books pictured Love to her, and she sought for the evidence of its existence, but nowhere could she see the passion of which she read. Love was in her heart, like seeds in the earth, awaiting the action of the sun. Her deep melancholy, caused by constant meditation on herself, brought her back by hidden by-ways to the brilliant dreams of her girlish days. Many a time she must have lived again that old romantic poem, making herself both the actor and the subject of it. Again she saw that island bathed in light, flowery, fragrant, caressing to her soul. Often her pallid eyes wandered around a salon with piercing curiosity. The men were all like Graslin. She studied them, and then she seemed to question their wives; but nothing on the faces of those women revealed an inward anguish like to hers, and she returned home sad and gloomy and

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distressed about herself. The authors she had read in the morning answered to the feelings in her soul; their thoughts pleased her; but at night she heard only empty words, not even presented in a lively way, — dull, empty, foolish conversations on petty local matters, or personalities of no interest to her. She was often surprised at the heat displayed in discussions which concerned no feeling or sentiment — to her the essence of existence, the soul of life.

Often she was seen with fixed eyes, mentally absorbed, thinking no doubt of the days of her youthful ignorance spent in that chamber full of harmonies now forever passed away. She felt a horrible repugnance against dropping into the gulf of pettiness in which the women among whom she lived were floundering. This repugnance, stamped on her forehead, on her lips, and ill-disguised, was taken for the insolence of a parvenue. Madame Graslin began to observe on all faces a certain coldness; she felt in all remarks an acrimony, the causes of which were unknown to her, for she had no intimate friend to enlighten or advise her. Injustice, which angers little minds, brings loftier souls to question themselves, and communicates a species of humility to them. Véronique condemned herself, endeavoring to see her own faults. She tried to be affable; they called her false. She grew more gentle still; they said she was a hypocrite, and her pious devotion helped on the calumny, She spent money, gave dinners and balls, and they taxed her with pride.

Unsuccessful in all these attempts, unjustly judged, rebuffed by the petty and tormenting pride which characterizes provincial society, where each individual is

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armed with pretensions and their attendant uneasiness, Madame Graslin fell back into utter solitude. She returned with eagerness to the arms of the Church. Her great soul, clothed with so weak a flesh, showed her the multiplied commandments of catholicism as so many stones placed for protection along the precipices of life, so many props brought by charitable hands to sustain human weakness on its weary way; and she followed, with greater rigor than ever, even the smallest religious practices.

On this the liberals of the town classed Madame Graslin among the *dévotes*, the ultras. To the different animosities Véronique had innocently acquired, the virulence of party feeling now added its periodical exasperation. But as this ostracism took nothing really from her, she quietly left society and lived in books which offered her such infinite resources. She meditated on what she read, she compared systems, she widened immeasurably the horizons of her intellect and the extent of her education; in this way she opened the gates of her soul to curiosity.

During this period of resolute study, in which religion supported and maintained her mind, she obtained the friendship of Monsieur Grossetête, one of those old men whose mental superiority grows rusty in provincial life, but who, when they come in contact with an eager mind, recover something of their former brilliancy. The good man took an earnest interest in Véronique, who, to reward him for the flattering warmth of heart which old men show to those they like, displayed before him, and for the first time in her life, the treasures of her soul and the acquirements of her mind, cultivated so

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secretly, and now full of blossom. An extract from a letter written by her about this time to Monsieur Grossetête will show the condition of the mind of a woman who was later to give signal proofs of a firm and lofty nature: —

"The flowers you sent me for the ball were charming, but they suggested harsh reflections. Those pretty creatures gathered by you, and doomed to wilt upon my bosom to adorn a fête, made me think of others that live and die unseen in the depths of your woods, their fragrance never inhaled by any one. I asked myself why I was dancing there, why I was decked with flowers, just as I ask God why he has placed me to live in this world.

"You see, my friend, all is a snare to the unhappy; the smallest matter brings the sick mind back to its woes; but the greatest evil of certain woes is the persistency which makes them a fixed idea pervading our lives. A constant sorrow ought rather to be a divine inspiration. You love flowers for themselves, whereas I love them as I love to listen to fine music. So, as I was saying, the secret of a mass of things escapes me. You, my old friend, you have a passion, — that of the horticulturist. When you return to town inspire me with that taste, so that I may rush to my greenhouse with eager feet, as you go to yours to watch the development of your plants, to bud and bloom with them, to admire what you create, — the new colors, the unexpected varieties, which expand and grow beneath your eyes by virtue of your care.

"My greenhouse, the one I watch, is filled with

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suffering souls. The miseries I try to lessen sadden my heart; and when I take them upon myself, when, after finding some young woman without clothing for her babe, some old man wanting bread, I have supplied their needs, the emotions their distress and its relief have caused me do not suffice my soul. Ah, friend, I feel within me untold powers — for evil, possibly, — which nothing can lower, which the sternest commands of our religion are unable to abase! Sometimes, when I go to see my mother, walking alone among the fields, I want to cry aloud, and I do so. It seems to me that my body is a prison in which some evil genius is holding a shuddering creature while awaiting the mysterious words which are to burst its obstructive form.

"But that comparison is not a just one. In me it seems to be the body that seeks escape, if I may say so. Religion fills my soul, books and their riches occupy my mind. Why, then, do I desire some anguish which shall destroy the enervating peace of my existence?

"Oh, if some sentiment, some mania, that I could cultivate, does not come into my life, I feel I shall sink at last into the gulf where all ideas are dulled, where character deteriorates, motives slacken, virtues lose their backbone, and all the forces of the soul are scattered, — a gulf in which I shall no longer be the being Nature meant me to be!

"This is what my bitter complainings mean. But do not let them hinder you from sending me those flowers. Your friendship is so soothing and so full of loving-kindness that it has for the last few months almost reconciled me to myself. Yes, it makes me happy to

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have you cast a glance upon my soul, at once so barren and so full of bloom; and I am thankful for every gentle word you say to one who rides the phantom steed of dreams, and returns worn-out."

At the end of the third year of his married life, Graslin, observing that his wife no longer used her horses, and finding a good market for them, sold them. He also sold the carriages, sent away the coachman, let the bishop have his man-cook, and contented himself with a woman. He no longer gave the monthly sum to his wife, telling her that he would pay all bills. He thought himself the most fortunate of husbands in meeting no opposition whatever to these proceedings from the woman who had brought him a million of francs as a dowry. Madame Graslin, brought up from childhood without ever seeing money, or being made to feel that it was an indispensable element in life, deserved no praise whatever for this apparent generosity. Graslin even noticed in a corner of the secretary all the sums he had ever given her, less the money she had bestowed in charity or spent upon her dress, the cost of which was much lessened by the profusion of her wedding trousseau.

Graslin boasted of Véronique to all Limoges as being a model wife. He next regretted the money spent on the house, and he ordered the furniture to be all packed away or covered up. His wife's bedroom, dressing-room, and boudoir were alone spared from these protective measures; which protect nothing, for furniture is injured just as much by being covered up as by being left uncovered. Graslin himself lived almost entirely



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on the ground-floor of the house, where he had his office, and resumed his old business habits with avidity. He thought himself an excellent husband because he went upstairs to breakfast and dined with his wife; but his unpunctuality was so great that it was not more than ten times a month that he began a meal with her; he had exacted, out of courtesy, that she should never wait for him. Véronique did, however, always remain in the room while her husband took his meals, serving him herself, that she might at least perform voluntarily some of the visible obligations of a wife.

The banker, to whom the things of marriage were very indifferent, and who had seen nothing in his wife but seven hundred and fifty thousand francs, had never once perceived Véronique's repugnance to him. Little by little he now abandoned Madame Graslin for his business. When he wished to put a bed in the room adjoining his office on the ground-floor, Véronique hastened to comply with the request. So that three years after their marriage these two ill-assorted beings returned to their original estate, each equally pleased and happy to do so. The moneyed man, possessing eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned with all the more eagerness to his old avaricious habits because he had momentarily quitted them. His two clerks and the office-boy were better lodged and rather better fed, and that was the only difference between the present and the past. His wife had a cook and maid (two indispensable servants): but except for the actual necessaries of life, not a penny left his coffers for his household.

Happy in the turn which things were now taking,

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Véronique saw in the evident satisfaction of the banker the absolution for this separation which she would never have asked for herself. She had no conception that she was as disagreeable to Graslin as Graslin was repulsive to her. This secret divorce made her both sad and joyful. She had always looked to motherhood for an interest in life; but up to this time (1828) the couple had had no prospect of a family.

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## IV.

### THE HISTORY OF MANY MARRIED WOMEN IN THE PROVINCES.

So now, in her magnificent house and envied for her wealth by all the town, Madame Graslin recovered the solitude of her early years in her father's house, less the glow of hope and the youthful joys of ignorance. She lived among the ruins of her castles in the air, enlightened by sad experience, sustained by religious faith, occupied by the care of the poor, whom she loaded with benefits. She made clothes for the babies, gave mattresses and sheets to those who slept on straw; she went among the poor herself, followed by her maid, a girl from Auvergne whom her mother procured for her, and who attached herself body and soul to her mistress. Véronique made an honorable spy of her, sending her to discover the places where suffering could be stilled, poverty softened.

This active benevolence, carried on with strict attention to religious duties, was hidden in the deepest secrecy and directed by the various rectors in the town, with whom Véronique had a full understanding in all her charitable deeds, so as not to suffer the money so needed for unmerited misfortunes to fall into the hands of vice. It was during this period of her life that she

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won a friendship quite as strong and quite as precious as that of old Grossetête. She became the beloved lamb of a distinguished priest, who was persecuted for his true merits, which were wholly misunderstood, one of the two grand-vicars of the diocese, named the Abbé Dutheil.

This priest belonged to the portion of the French clergy who incline toward certain concessions, who would be glad to associate the Church with the people's interests, and so enable it to regain, through the application of true evangelical doctrine, its former influence over the masses, which it might then draw to closer relations with the monarchy. Whether it was that the Abbé Dutheil recognized the impossibility of enlightening the court of Rome and the higher clergy on this point, or that he had consented to sacrifice his own opinions to those of his superiors, it is certain that he remained within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, being very well aware that any manifestation of his principles at the present time would deprive him of all chance of the episcopate.

This eminent priest united in himself great Christian modesty and a noble character. Without pride or ambition he remained at his post and did his duty in the midst of perils. The liberals of the town were ignorant of the motives of his conduct; they claimed him as being of their opinions and considered him a patriot, — a word which meant revolutionist in Catholic minds. Loved by his inferiors, who dared not, however, proclaim his merits, feared by his equals who kept watch upon him, he was a source of embarrassment to the bishop. His virtues and his knowledge,

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envied, no doubt, prevented persecution; it was impossible to complain of him, though he criticised frankly the political blunders by which both the throne and the clergy mutually compromised themselves. He often foretold results, but vainly, — like poor Cassandra, who was equally cursed before and after the disaster she predicted. Short of a revolution the Abbé Dutheil was likely to remain as he was, one of those stones hidden in the foundation wall on which the edifice rests. His utility was recognized and they left him in his place, like many other solid minds whose rise to power is the terror of mediocrities. If, like the Abbé de Lamennais, he had taken up his pen he would doubtless, like him, have been blasted by the court of Rome.

The Abbé Dutheil was imposing in appearance. His exterior revealed the underlying of a profound nature always calm and equable on the surface. His tall figure and its thinness did not detract from the general effect of his lines, which recalled those by which the genius of Spanish painters delights to represent the great monastic meditators, and those selected at a later period by Thorwaldsen for the Apostles. The long, almost rigid folds of the face, in harmony with those of his vestment, had the grace which the middle-ages bring into relief in the mystical statues placed beside the portals of their churches. Gravity of thought, word, and accent, harmonized in this man and became him well. Seeing his dark eyes hollowed by austerities and surrounded by a brown circle; seeing, too, his forehead, yellow as some old stone, his head and hands almost fleshless, men desired to hear the voice and the instructions which issued from his

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lips. This purely physical grandeur which accords with moral grandeur, gave this priest a somewhat haughty and disdainful air, which was instantly counteracted to an observer by his modesty and by his speech, though it did not predispose others in his favor. In some more elevated station these advantages would have obtained that necessary ascendency over the masses which the people willingly allow to men who are thus endowed. But superiors will not forgive their inferiors for possessing the externals of greatness, nor for displaying that majesty so prized by the ancients but so often lacking to the administrators of modern power.

By one of those strange freaks of circumstance which are never accounted for, the other vicar-general, the Abbé de Grancour, a stout little man with a rosy complexion and blue eyes, whose opinions were diametrically opposed to those of the Abbé Dutheil, liked to be in the latter's company, although he never testified this liking enough to put himself out of the good graces of the bishop, to whom he would have sacrificed everything. The Abbé de Grancour believed in the merit of his colleague, recognized his talents, secretly accepted his doctrines, and condemned them openly; for the little priest was one of those men whom superiority attracts and intimidates, — who dislike it and yet cultivate it. "He would embrace me and condemn me," the Abbé Dutheil said of him. The Abbé de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies; he was therefore likely to live and die a vicar-general. He said he was drawn to visit Madame Graslin by the desire of counselling so religious and benevolent a person; and the bishop

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approved of his doing so, — Monsieur de Grancour's real object being to spend a few evenings with the Abbé Dutheil in Véronique's salon.

The two priests now came pretty regularly to see Madame Graslin, and make her a sort of report about her poor and discuss the best means of succoring and improving them. But Monsieur Graslin had now begun to tighten his purse-strings, having made the discovery, in spite of the innocent deceptions of his wife and her maid, that the money he paid did not go solely for household expenses and for dress. He was angry when he found out how much money his wife's charities cost him; he called the cook to account, inquired into all the details of the housekeeping, and showed what a grand administrator he was by practically proving that his house could be splendidly kept for three thousand francs a year. Then he put his wife on an allowance of a hundred francs a month, and boasted of his liberality in so doing. The office-boy, who liked flowers, was made to take care of the garden on Sundays. Having dismissed the gardener, Graslin used the greenhouse to store articles conveyed to him as security for loans. He let the birds in the aviary die for want of care, to avoid the cost of their food and attendance. And he even took advantage of a winter when there was no ice, to give up his icehouse and save the expense of filling it.

By 1828 there was not a single article of luxury in the house which he had not in some way got rid of. Parsimony reigned unchecked in the hôtel Graslin. The master's face, greatly improved during the three years spent with his wife (who induced him to follow

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his physician's advice), now became redder, more fiery, more blotched than before. Business had taken such proportions that it was necessary to promote the boy-of-all-work to the position of cashier, and to find some stout Auvergnat for the rougher service of the hôtel Graslin.

Thus, four years after her marriage, this very rich woman could not dispose of a single penny by her own will. The avarice of her husband succeeded the avarice of her parents. Madame Graslin had never understood the necessity of money until the time came when her benevolence was checked.

By the beginning of the year 1828 Véronique had entirely recovered the blooming health which had given such beauty to the innocent young girl sitting at her window in the old house in the rue de la Cité; but by this time she had acquired a fine literary education, and was fully able to think and to speak. An excellent judgment gave real depth to her words. Accustomed now to the little things of life, she wore the fashions of the period with infinite grace. When she chanced about this time to visit a salon she found herself — not without a certain inward surprise — received by all with respectful esteem. These changed feelings and this welcome were due to the two vicars-general and to old Grossetête. Informed by them of her noble hidden life, and the good deeds so constantly done in their midst, the bishop and a few influential persons spoke of Madame Graslin as a flower of true piety, a violet fragrant with virtues; in consequence of which, one of those strong reactions set in, unknown to Véronique, which are none the less solid and durable because they

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are long in coming. This change in public opinion gave additional influence to Véronique's salon, which was now visited by all the chief persons in the society of the town, in consequence of certain circumstances we shall now relate.

Toward the close of this year the young Vicomte de Grandville was sent as deputy solicitor to the courts of Limoges. He came preceded by a reputation always given to Parisians in the provinces. A few days after his arrival, during a soirée at the prefecture, he made answer to a rather foolish question, that the most amiable, intelligent, and distinguished woman he had met in the town was Madame Graslin.

"Perhaps you think her the handsomest also?" said the wife of the receiver-general.

"I cannot think so in your presence, madame," he replied, "and therefore I am in doubt. Madame Graslin possesses a beauty which need inspire no jealousy, for it seldom shows itself: she is only beautiful to those she loves; you are beautiful to all the world. When Madame Graslin's soul is moved by true enthusiasm, it sheds an expression upon her face which changes it completely. Her countenance is like a landscape, — dull in winter, glorious in summer; but the world will always see it in winter. When she talks with friends on some literary or philosophical topic, or on certain religious questions which interest her, she is roused into appearing suddenly an unknown woman of marvellous beauty."

This declaration, which was caused by observing the phenomenon that formerly made Véronique so beautiful on her return from the holy table, made a great noise

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in Limoges, where for a time the young deputy, to whom the place of the *procureur-général* was said to be promised, played a leading part. In all provincial towns a man who rises a trifle above others becomes, for a period more or less protracted, the object of a liking which resembles enthusiasm, and which usually deceives the object of this ephemeral worship. It is to this social caprice that we owe so many local geniuses, soon ignored and their false reputations mortified. The men whom women make the fashion in this way are oftener strangers than compatriots.

In this particular case the admirers of the Vicomte de Grandville were not mistaken; he was in truth a superior man. Madame Graslin was the only woman he found in Limoges with whom he could exchange ideas and keep up a varied conversation. A few months after his arrival, attracted by the increasing charm of Véronique's manners and conversation, he proposed to the Abbé Dutheil, and a few other of the remarkable men in Limoges, to meet in the evenings at Madame Graslin's house and play whist. At this time Madame Graslin was at home five evenings in the week to visitors, reserving two free days, as she said, for herself.

When Madame Graslin had thus gathered about her the distinguished men we have mentioned, others were not sorry to give themselves the reputation of cleverness by seeking to join the same society. Véronique also received three or four of the distinguished officers of the garrison and staff; but the freedom of mind displayed by her guests, and the tacit discretion enjoined by the manners of the best society, made her extremely

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cautious as to the admission of those who now vied with each other to obtain her invitations.

The other women in this provincial society were not without jealousy in seeing Madame Graslin surrounded by the most agreeable and distinguished men in the town; but by this time Véronique's social power was all the stronger because it was exclusive; she accepted the intimacy of four or five women only, and these were strangers in Limoges who had come from Paris with their husbands, and who held in horror the petty gossip of provincial life. If any one outside of this little clique of superior persons came in to make a visit, the conversation immediately changed, and the habitués of the house talked commonplace.

The hôtel Graslin thus became an oasis where intelligent minds found relaxation and relief from the dulness of provincial life; where persons connected with the government could express themselves freely on politics without fear of having their words taken down and repeated; where all could satirize that which provoked satire, and where each individual abandoned his professional trammels and yielded himself up to his natural self.

So, after being the most obscure young girl in all Limoges, considered ugly, dull, and vacant, Madame Graslin, at the beginning of the year 1828, was regarded as one of the leading personages in the town, and the most noted woman in society. No one went to see her in the mornings, for all knew her habits of benevolence and the regularity of her religious observances. She always went to early mass so as not to delay her husband's breakfast, for which, however, there was no

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fixed hour, though she never failed to be present and to serve it herself. Graslin had trained his wife to this little ceremony. He continued to praise her on all occasions; he thought her perfect; she never asked him for anything; he could pile up louis upon louis, and spread his investments over a wide field of enterprise through his relations with the Brézacs; he sailed with a fair wind and well freighted over the ocean of commerce, — his intense business interest keeping him in the still, though half-intoxicated, frenzy of gamblers watching events on the green table of speculation.

During this happy period, and until the beginning of the year 1829, Madame Graslin attained, in the eyes of her friends, to a degree of beauty that was really extraordinary, the reasons of which they were unable to explain. The blue of the iris expanded like a flower, diminishing the dark circle of the pupil, and seeming to float in a liquid and languishing light that was full of love. Her forehead, illumined by thoughts and memories of happiness, was seen to whiten like the zenith before the dawn, and its lines were purified by an inward fire. Her face lost those heated brown tones which betoken a disturbance of the liver, — that malady of vigorous constitutions, or of persons whose soul is distressed and whose affections are thwarted. Her temples became adorably fresh and pure; gleams of the celestial face of a Raffaelle showed themselves now and then in hers, — a face hitherto obscured by the malady of grief, as the canvas of the great master is incrusted by time. Her hands seemed whiter; her shoulders took on an exquisite fulness; her graceful, animated movements gave to her supple figure its utmost charm.

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The Limoges women accused her of being in love with Monsieur de Grandville, who certainly paid her assiduous attentions, to which Véronique opposed all the barriers of a conscientious resistance. The viscount professed for her one of those respectful attachments which did not blind the habitual visitors of her salon. The priests and men of sense saw plainly that this affection, which was love on the part of the young man, did not go beyond the permissible line in Madame Graslin. Weary at last of a resistance based on religious principle, the Vicomte de Grandville consoled himself (to the knowledge of his intimates) with other and easier friendships; which did not, however, lessen his constant admiration and worship of the beautiful Madame Graslin, — such was the term by which she was designated in 1829.

The most clear-sighted among those who surrounded her attributed the change which rendered Véronique increasingly charming to her friends to the secret delight which all women, even the most religious, feel when they see themselves courted; and to the satisfaction of living at last in a circle congenial to her mind, where the pleasure of exchanging ideas and the happiness of being surrounded by intelligent and well-informed men and true friends, whose attachment deepened day by day, had dispersed forever the weary dulness of her life.

Perhaps, however, closer, more perceptive or sceptical observers were needed than those who frequented the hôtel Graslin, to detect the barbaric grandeur, the plebeian force of the People which lay deep-hidden in her soul. If sometimes her friends surprised her in a

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torpor of meditation either gloomy or merely pensive, they knew she bore upon her heart the miseries of others, and had doubtless that morning been initiated in some fresh sorrow, or had penetrated to some haunt where vices terrify the soul with their candor.

The viscount, now promoted to be *procureur-général*, would occasionally blame her for certain unintelligent acts of charity by which, as he knew from his secret police-reports, she had given encouragement to criminal schemes.

"If you ever want money for any of your paupers, let me be a sharer in your good deeds," said old Grossetête, talking Véronique's hand.

"Ah!" she replied with a sigh, "it is impossible to make everybody rich."

At the beginning of this year an event occurred which was destined to change the whole interior life of this woman and to transform the splendid expression of her countenance into something far more interesting in the eyes of painters.

Becoming uneasy about his health, Graslin, to his wife's despair, no longer desired to live on the ground-floor. He returned to the conjugal chamber and allowed himself to be nursed. The news soon spread throughout Limoges that Madame Graslin was pregnant. Her sadness, mingled with joy, struck the minds of her friends, who then for the first time perceived that in spite of her virtues she had been happy in the fact of living separate from her husband. Perhaps she had hoped for some better fate ever since the time when, as it was known, the attorney-general had declined to marry the richest heiress in the place, in order to keep his loyalty to her.

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From this suggestion there grew up in the minds of the profound politicians who played their whist at the hôtel Graslin a belief that the viscount and the young wife had based certain hopes on the ill-health of the banker which were now frustrated. The great agitations which marked this period of Véronique's life, the anxieties which a first childbirth causes in every woman, and which, it is said, threatens special danger when she is past her first youth, made her friends more attentive than ever to her; they vied with each other in showing her those little kindnesses which proved how warm and solid their affection really was.

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## V.

### TASCHERON.

It was in this year that Limoges witnessed a terrible event and the singular drama of the Tascheron trial, in which the young Vicomte de Grandville displayed the talents which afterwards made him *procureur général.*

An old man living in a lonely house in the suburb of Saint-Étienne was murdered. A large fruit-garden lay between the road and the house, which was also separated from the adjoining fields by a pleasure-garden, at the farther end of which were several old and disused greenhouses. In front of the house a rapid slope to the river bank gave a view of the Vienne. The courtyard, which also sloped downward, ended at a little wall, from which small columns rose at equal distances united by a railing, more, however, for ornament than protection, for the bars of the railing were of painted wood.

The old man, named Pingret, noted for his avarice, lived with a single woman-servant, a country-girl who did all the work of the house. He himself took care of his espaliers, trimmed his trees, gathered his fruit, and sent it to Limoges for sale, together with early vegetables, in the raising of which he excelled.



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The niece of this old man, and his sole heiress, married to a gentleman of small means living in Limoges, a Madame des Vanneaulx, had again and again urged her uncle to hire a man to protect the house, pointing out to him that he would thus obtain the profits of certain uncultivated ground where he now grew nothing but clover. But the old man steadily refused. More than once a discussion on the subject had cut into the whist-playing of Limoges. A few shrewd heads declared that the old miser buried his gold in that clover-field.

"If I were Madame des Vanneaulx," said a wit, "I should n't torment my uncle about it; if somebody murders him, why, let him be murdered! I should inherit the money."

Madame des Vanneaulx, however, wanted to keep her uncle, after the manner of the managers of the Italian Opera, who entreat their popular tenor to wrap up his throat, and give him their cloak if he happens to have forgotten his own. She had sent old Pingret a fine English mastiff, which Jeanne Malassis, the servant-woman brought back the next day saying: —

"Your uncle does n't want another mouth to feed."

The result proved how well-founded were the niece's fears. Pingret was murdered on a dark night, in the middle of his clover-field, where he may have been adding a few coins to a buried pot of gold. The servant-woman, awakened by the struggle, had the courage to go to the assistance of the old miser, and the murderer was under the necessity of killing her to suppress her testimony. This necessity, which frequently causes murderers to increase the number of their victims, is an evil produced by the fear of the death penalty.

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This double murder was attended by curious circumstances, which told as much for the prosecution as for the defence. After the neighbors had missed seeing the little old Pingret and his maid for a whole morning and had gazed at his house through the wooden railings as they passed it, and seen that, contrary to custom, the doors and windows were still closed, an excitement began in the Faubourg Saint-Étienne which presently reached the rue de la Cloche, where Madame des Vanneaulx resided.

The niece was always in expectation of some such catastrophe, and she at once notified the officers of the law, who went to the house and broke in the gate. They soon discovered in a clover patch four holes, and near two of these holes lay the fragments of earthenware pots, which had doubtless been full of gold the night before. In the other two holes, scarcely covered up, were the bodies of old Pingret and Jeanne Malassis, who had been buried with their clothes on. The poor girl had run to her master's assistance in her night-gown, with bare feet.

While the *procureur-du-roi*, the commissary of police, and the examining magistrate were gathering all particulars for the basis of their action, the luckless des Vanneaulx picked up the broken pots and calculated from their capacity the sum lost. The magistrates admitted the correctness of their calculations and entered the sum stolen on their records as, in all probability, a thousand gold coins to each pot. But were these coins forty-eight or forty, twenty-four or twenty francs in value? All expectant heirs in Limoges sympathized with the des Vanneaulx. The Limousin im-

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agination was greatly stirred by the spectacle of the broken pots. As for old Pingret, who often sold vegetables himself in the market, lived on bread and onions, never spent more than three hundred francs a year, obliged and disobliged no one, and had never done one atom of good in the suburb of Saint-Étienne where he lived, his death did not excite the slightest regret. Poor Jeanne Malassis' heroism, which the old miser, had she saved him, would certainly not have rewarded, was thought rash; the number of souls who admired it was small in comparison with those who said: "For my part, I should have stayed in my bed."

The police found neither pen nor ink wherewith to write their report in the bare, dilapidated, cold, and dismal house. Observing persons and the heir might then have noticed a curious inconsistency which may be seen in certain misers. The dread the little old man had of the slightest outlay showed itself in the non-repaired roof which opened its sides to the light and the rain and snow; in the cracks of the walls; in the rotten doors ready to fall at the slightest shock; in the windows, where the broken glass was replaced by paper not even oiled. All the windows were without curtains, the fireplaces without mirrors or andirons; the hearth was garnished with one log of wood and a few little sticks almost caked with the soot which had fallen down the chimney. There were two rickety chairs, two thin couches, a few cracked pots and mended plates, a one-armed armchair, a dilapidated bed, the curtains of which time had embroidered with a bold hand, a worm-eaten secretary where the miser kept his seeds, a pile of linen thickened by many

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darns, and a heap of ragged garments, which existed only by the will of their master; he being dead they dropped into shreds, powder, chemical dissolution, in fact I know not into what form of utter ruin, as soon as the heir or the officers of the law laid rough hands upon them; they disappeared as if afraid of being publicly sold.

The population at Limoges was much concerned for these worthy des Vanneaulx, who had two children; and yet, no sooner did the law lay hands upon the reputed doer of the crime than the guilty personage absorbed attention, became a hero, and the des Vanneaulx were relegated into a corner of the picture.

Toward the end of March Madame Graslin began to feel some of those pains which precede a first confinement and cannot be concealed. The inquiry as to the murder was then going on, but the murderer had not as yet been arrested.

Véronique now received her friends in her bedroom, where they played whist. For several days past Madame Graslin had not left the house, and she seemed to be tormented by several of those caprices attributed to women in her condition. Her mother came to see her almost every day, and the two women remained for hours in consultation.

It was nine o'clock, and the card tables were still without players, for every one was talking of the murder. Monsieur de Grandville entered the room.

"We have arrested the murderer of old Pingret," he said, joyfully.

"Who is it?" was asked on all sides.

"A porcelain workman; a man whose character has

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always been excellent, and who was in a fair way to make his fortune. He worked in your husband's old factory," added Monsieur de Grandville, turning to Madame Graslin.

"What is his name?" asked Véronique, in a weak voice.

"Jean-François Tascheron."

"Unhappy man!" she answered. "Yes, I have often seen him; my poor father recommended him to my care as some one to be looked after."

"He left the factory before Sauviat's death," said her mother, "and went to that of Messrs. Philippart, who offered him higher wages — But my daughter is scarcely well enough for this exciting conversation," she added, calling attention to Madame Graslin, whose face was as white as her sheets.

After that evening Mère Sauviat gave up her own home, and came, in spite of her sixty-six years, to stay with her daughter and nurse her through her confinement. She never left the room; Madame Graslin's friends found the old woman always at the bed's head busy with her eternal knitting, — brooding over Véronique as she did when the girl had the small-pox, answering questions for her and often refusing to admit visitors. The maternal and filial love of mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that these actions of Madame Sauviat caused no comment.

A few days later, when the viscount, thinking to amuse the invalid, began to relate details which the whole town were eagerly demanding about Jean-François Tascheron, Madame Sauviat again stopped him hastily, declaring that he would give her daughter

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bad dreams. Véronique, however, looking fixedly at Monsieur de Grandville, asked him to finish what he was saying. Thus her friends, and she herself, were the first to know the results of the preliminary inquiry, which would soon be made public. The following is a brief epitome of the facts on which the indictment found against the prisoner was based.

Jean-François Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a family, who lived in the village of Montégnac.

Twenty years before this crime, which was famous throughout the Limousin, the canton of Montégnac was known for its evil ways. The saying was proverbial in Limoges that out of one hundred criminals in the department fifty belonged to the arrondissement of Montégnac. Since 1816, however, two years after a priest named Bonnet was sent there as rector, it had lost its bad reputation, and the inhabitants no longer sent their heavy contingent to the assizes. This change was widely attributed to the influence acquired by the rector, Monsieur Bonnet, over a community which had lately been a hotbed for evil-minded persons whose actions dishonored the whole region. The crime of Jean-François Tascheron brought back upon Montégnac its former ill-savor.

By a curious trick of chance, the Taschérons were almost the only family in this village community who had retained through its evil period the old rigid morals and religious habits which are noticed by the observers of to-day to be rapidly disappearing throughout the country districts. This family had therefore formed a point of reliance to the rector, who naturally bore it

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on his heart. The Tascherons, remarkable for their uprightness, their union, their love of work, had never given other than good examples to Jean-François. Induced by the praiseworthy ambition of earning his living by a trade, the lad had left his native village, to the regret of his parents and friends, who greatly loved him, and had come to Limoges. During his two years' apprenticeship in a porcelain factory, his conduct was worthy of all praise; no apparent ill-conduct had led up to the horrible crime which was now to end his life. On the contrary, Jean-François Tascheron had given the time which other workmen were in the habit of spending in wine-shops and debauchery to study and self-improvement.

The most searching and minute inquiry on the part of the provincial authorities (who have plenty of time on their hands) failed to throw any light on the secrets of the young man's life. When the mistress of the humble lodging-house in which he lived was questioned she said she had never had a lodger whose moral conduct was as blameless. He was naturally amiable and gentle, and sometimes gay. About a year before the commission of the crime, his habits changed: he slept away from home several times a month and often for consecutive nights; but where, she did not know, though she thought, from the state of his shoes when he returned, that he must have been into the country. She noticed that although he appeared to have left the town, he never wore his heavy boots, but always a pair of light shoes. He shaved before starting, and put on clean linen. Hearing this, the police turned their attention to houses of ill-fame and questionable resorts; but

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Jean-François Tascheron was found to be wholly unknown among them. The authorities then made a search through the working-girl and *grisette* class; but none of these women had had relations with the accused.

A crime without a motive is unheard of, especially in a young man whose desire for education and whose laudable ambition gave him higher ideas and a superior judgment to that of other workmen. The police and the examining justice, finding themselves balked in the above directions, attributed the murder to a passion for gambling; but after the most searching inquiries it was proved that Tascheron never played cards.

At first Jean-François intrenched himself in a system of flat denials, which, of course, in presence of a jury, would fall before proof; they seemed to show the collusion of some person either well versed in law or gifted with an intelligent mind. The following are the chief proofs the prosecution were prepared to present, and they are, as is frequently the case in trials for murder, both important and trifling; to wit: —

The absence of Tascheron during the night of the crime, and his refusal to say where he was, for the accused did not offer to set up an alibi; a fragment of his blouse, torn off by the servant-woman in the struggle, found close by on a tree to which the wind had carried it; his presence that evening near Pingret's house, which was noticed by passers and by persons living in the neighborhood, though it might not have been remembered unless for the crime; a false key made by Tascheron which fitted the door opening to the fields; this key was found carefully buried two feet

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below one of the miser's holes, where Monsieur des Vanneaulx, digging deep to make sure there was not another layer of treasure-pots, chanced to find it; the police, after many researches, found the different persons who had furnished Tascheron with the iron, loaned him the vice, and given him the file, with which the key was presumably made.

The key was the first real clue. It put the police on the track of Tascheron, whom they arrested on the frontiers of the department, in a wood where he was awaiting the passage of a diligence. An hour later he would have started for America.

Besides all this, and in spite of the care with which certain footmarks in the ploughed field and on the mud of the road had been effaced and covered up, the searchers had found in several places the imprint of shoes, which they carefully measured and described, and which were afterwards found to correspond with the soles of Tascheron's shoes taken from his lodgings. This fatal proof confirmed the statement of the landlady. The authorities now attributed the crime to some foreign influence, and not to the man's personal intention; they believed he had accomplices, basing this idea on the impossibility of one man's carrying away the buried money; for however strong he might be, no man could carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold to any distance. If each pot contained, as it was supposed to have done, about that sum, this would have required four trips to and from the clover-patch. Now, a singular circumstance went far to prove the hour at which the crime was committed. In the terror Jeanne Malassis must have felt on hearing her master's cries,

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she knocked over, as she rose, the table at her bedside, on which lay her watch, the only present the miser had given her in five years. The mainspring was broken by the shock, and the hands had stopped at two in the morning. By the middle of March (the date of the murder) daylight dawns between five and six o'clock. To whatever distance the gold had been carried, Tascheron could not possibly, under any apparent hypothesis, have transported it alone.

The care with which some of the footsteps were effaced, while others, to which Tascheron's shoes fitted, remained, certainly pointed to some mysterious assistant. Forced into hypotheses, the authorities once more attributed the crime to a desperate passion; not finding any trace of the object of such a passion in the lower classes, they began to look higher. Perhaps some bourgeoise, sure of the discretion of a man who had the face and bearing of a hero, had been drawn into a romance the outcome of which was crime.

This supposition was to some extent justified by the facts of the murder. The old man had been killed by blows with a spade; evidently, therefore, the murder was sudden, unpremeditated, fortuitous. The lovers might have planned the robbery, but not the murder. The lover and the miser, Tascheron and Pingret, each under the influence of his master passion, must have met by the buried hoards, both drawn thither by the gleaming of gold on the utter darkness of that fatal night.

In order to obtain, if possible, some light on this latter supposition, the authorities arrested and kept in solitary confinement a sister of Jean-François, to whom

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he was much attached, hoping to obtain through her some clue to the mystery of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron took refuge in total denial of any knowledge whatever, which gave rise to a suspicion that she did know something of the causes of the crime, although in fact she knew nothing.

The accused himself showed points of character that were rare among the peasantry. He baffled the cleverest police-spies employed against him, without knowing their real character. To the leading minds of the magistracy his guilt seemed caused by the influence of passion, and not by necessity or greed, as in the case of ordinary murderers, who usually pass through stages of crime and punishment before they commit the supreme deed. Active and careful search was made in following up this idea; but the uniform discretion of the prisoner gave no clue whatever to his prosecutors. The plausible theory of his attachment to a woman of the upper classes having once been admitted, Jean-François was subjected to the most insidious examination upon it; but his caution triumphed over all the moral tortures the examining judge applied to him. When, making a final effort, that official told him that the person for whom he had committed the crime was discovered and arrested, his face did not change, and he replied ironically: —

"I should like very much to see him."

When the public were informed of these circumstances, many persons adopted the suspicions of the magistrates, which seemed to be confirmed by Tascheron's savage obstinacy in giving no account of himself. Increased interest was felt in a young man who was now

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a problem. It is easy to see how these elements kept public curiosity on the *qui vive*, and with what eager interest the trial would be followed. But in spite of every effort on the part of the police, the prosecution stopped short on the threshold of hypothesis; it did not venture to go farther into the mystery where all was obscurity and danger. In certain judicial cases half-certainties are not sufficient for the judges to proceed upon. Nevertheless the case was ordered for trial, in hopes that the truth would come to the surface when the case was brought into court, an ordeal under which many criminals contradict themselves.

Monsieur Graslin was one of the jury; so that either through her husband or through Monsieur de Grandville, the public prosecutor, Véronique knew all the details of the criminal trial which, for a fortnight, kept the department, and we may say all France, in a state of excitement. The attitude maintained by the accused seemed to justify the theory of the prosecution. More than once when the court opened, his eyes turned upon the brilliant assemblage of women who came to find emotions in a real drama, as though he sought for some one. Each time that the man's glance, clear, but impenetrable, swept along those elegant ranks, a movement was perceptible, a sort of shock, as though each woman feared she might appear his accomplice under the inquisitorial eyes of judge and prosecutor.

The hitherto useless efforts of the prosecution were now made public, also the precautions taken by the criminal to insure the success of his crime. It was shown that Jean-François Tascheron had obtained a passport for North America some months before the

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crime was committed. Thus the plan of leaving France was fully formed; the object of his passion must therefore be a married woman; for he would have no reason to flee the country with a young girl. Possibly the crime had this one object in view, namely, to obtain sufficient means to support this unknown woman in comfort.

The prosecution had found no passport issued to a woman for North America. In case she had obtained one in Paris, the registers of that city were searched, also those of the towns contiguous to Limoges, but without result. All the shrewdest minds in the community followed the case with deep attention. While the more virtuous dames of the department attributed the wearing of pumps on a muddy road (an inexplicable circumstance in the ordinary lives of such shoes) to the necessity of noiselessly watching old Pingret, the men pointed out that pumps were very useful in silently passing through a house — up stairways and along corridors — without discovery.

So Jean-François Tascheron and his mistress (by this time she was young, beautiful, romantic, for every one made a portrait of her) had evidently intended to escape with only one passport, to which they would forge the additional words, "and wife." The card tables were deserted at night in the various social salons, and malicious tongues discussed what women were known in March, 1829, to have gone to Paris, and what others could be making, openly or secretly, preparations for a journey. Limoges might be said to be enjoying its Fualdès trial, with an unknown and mysterious Madame Manson for an additional excitement.

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Never was any provincial town so stirred to its depths as Limoges after each day's session. Nothing was talked of but the trial, all the incidents of which increased the interest felt for the accused, whose able answers, learnedly taken up, turned and twisted and commented upon, gave rise to ample discussions. When one of the jurors asked Tascheron why he had taken a passport for America, the man replied that he had intended to establish a porcelain manufactory in that country. Thus, without committing himself to any line of defence, he covered his accomplice, leaving it to be supposed that the crime was committed, if at all, to obtain funds for this business venture.

In the midst of such excitement it was impossible for Véronique's friends to refrain from discussing in her presence the progress of the case and the reticence of the criminal. Her health was extremely feeble; but the doctor having advised her going out into the fresh air, she had on one occasion taken her mother's arm and walked as far as Madame Sauviat's house in the country, where she rested. On her return she endeavored to keep about until her husband came to his dinner, which she always served to him herself. On this occasion Graslin, being detained in the court-room, did not come in till eight o'clock. She went into the dining-room as usual, and was present at a discussion which took place among a number of her friends who had assembled there.

"If my poor father were still living," she remarked to them, "we should know more about the matter; possibly this man might never have become a criminal. I think you have all taken a singular idea about the

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matter. You insist that love is at the bottom of the crime, and I agree with you there; but why do you think this unknown person is a married woman? He may have loved some young girl whose father and mother would not let her marry him."

"A young girl could, sooner or later, have married him legitimately," replied Monsieur Grandville. "Tascheron has no lack of patience: he had time to make sufficient means to support her while awaiting the time when all girls are at liberty to marry against the wishes of their parents; he need not have committed a crime to obtain her."

"I did not know that a girl could marry in that way," said Madame Graslin; "but how is it that in a town like this, where all things are known, and where everybody sees everything that happens to his neighbor, not the slightest clue to this woman has been obtained? In order to love, persons must see each other and consequently be seen. What do you really think, you magistrates?" she added, plunging a fixed look into the eyes of the *procureur-général.*

"We think that the woman belongs to the bourgeois or the commercial class."

"I don't agree with you," said Madame Graslin. "A woman of that class does not have elevated sentiments."

This reply drew all eyes on Véronique, and the whole company waited for an explanation of so paradoxical a speech.

"During the hours I lie awake at night I have not been able to keep my mind from dwelling on this mysterious affair," she said slowly, "and I think I have

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fathomed Tascheron's motive. I believe the person he loves is a young girl, because a married woman has interests, if not feelings, which partly fill her heart and prevent her from yielding so completely to a great passion as to leave her home. There is such a thing as a love proceeding from passion which is half maternal, and to me it is evident that this man was loved by a woman who wished to be his prop, his Providence. She must have put into her passion something of the genius that inspires the work of artists and poets, the creative force which exists in woman under another form; for it is her mission to create men, not things. Our works are our children; our children are the pictures, books, and statues of our lives. Are we not artists in their earliest education? I say that this unknown woman, if she is not a young girl, has never been a mother but is filled with the maternal instinct; she has loved this man to form him, to develop him. It needs a feminine element in you men of law to detect these shades of motive, which too often escape you. If I had been your deputy," she said, looking straight at the *procureur-général*, "I should have found the guilty woman, if indeed there is any guilt about it. I agree with the Abbé Dutheil that these lovers meant to fly to America with the money of old Pingret. The theft led to the murder by the fatal logic which the punishment of death inspires. And so," she added with an appealing look at Monsieur de Grandville, "I think it would be merciful in you to abandon the theory of premeditation, for in so doing you would save the man's life. He is evidently a fine man in spite of his crime; he might, perhaps, repair that crime by a great repentance if you



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gave him time. The works of repentance ought to count for something in the judgment of the law. In these days is there nothing better for a human being to do than to give his life, or build, as in former times, a cathedral of Milan, to expiate his crimes?"

"Your ideas are noble, madame," said Monsieur de Grandville, "but, premeditation apart, Tascheron would still be liable to the penalty of death on account of the other serious and proved circumstances attending the crime, — such as forcible entrance and burglary at night."

"Then you think that he will certainly be found guilty?" she said, lowering her eyelids.

"I am certain of it," he said; "the prosecution has a strong case."

A slight tremor rustled Madame Graslin's dress.

"I feel cold," she said. Taking her mother's arm she went to bed.

"She seemed quite herself this evening," said her friends.

The next day Véronique was much worse and kept her bed. When her physician expressed surprise at her condition she said, smiling: —

"I told you that that walk would do me no good."

Ever since the opening of the trial Tascheron's demeanor had been equally devoid of hypocrisy or bravado. Véronique's physician, intending to divert his patient's mind, tried to explain this demeanor, which the man's defenders were making the most of. The prisoner was misled, said the doctor, by the talents of his lawyer, and was sure of acquittal; at times his face expressed a hope that was greater than that of

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merely escaping death. The antecedents of the man (who was only twenty-three years old) were so at variance with the crime now charged to him that his legal defenders claimed his present bearing to be a proof of innocence; besides, the overwhelming circumstantial proofs of the theory of the prosecution were made to appear so weak by his advocate that the man was buoyed up by the lawyer's arguments. To save his client's life the lawyer made the most of the evident want of premeditation; hypothetically he admitted the premeditation of the robbery but not of the murders, which were evidently (no matter who was the guilty party) the result of two unexpected struggles. Success, the doctor said, was really as doubtful for one side as for the other.

After this visit of her physician Véronique received that of the *procureur-général*, who was in the habit of coming in every morning on his way to the court-room.

"I have read the arguments of yesterday," she said to him, "and to-day, as I suppose, the evidence for the defence begins. I am so interested in that man that I should like to have him saved. Could n't you for once in your life forego a triumph? Let his lawyer beat you. Come, make me a present of the man's life, and perhaps you shall have mine some day. The able presentation of the defence by Tascheron's lawyer really raises a strong doubt, and —"

"Why, you are quite agitated," said the viscount somewhat surprised.

"Do you know why?" she answered. "My husband has just remarked a most horrible coincidence, which is really enough in the present state of my

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nerves, to cause my death. If you condemn this man to death it will be on the very day when I shall give birth to my child."

"But I can't change the laws," said the lawyer.

"Ah! you don't know how to love," she retorted, closing her eyes; then she turned her head on the pillow and made him an imperative sign to leave the room.

Monsieur Graslin pleaded strongly but in vain with his fellow-jurymen for acquittal, giving a reason which some of them adopted; a reason suggested by his wife: —

"If we do not condemn this man to death, but allow him to live, the des Vanneaulx will in the end recover their property."

This weighty argument made a division of the jury, into five for condemnation against seven for acquittal, which necessitated an appeal to the court; but the judge sided with the minority. According to the legal system of that day this action led to a verdict of guilty. When sentence was passed upon him Tascheron flew into a fury which was natural enough in a man full of life and strength, but which the court and jury and lawyers and spectators had rarely witnessed in persons who were thought to be unjustly condemned.

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## VI.

### DISCUSSIONS AND CHRISTIAN SOLICITUDES.

In spite of the verdict, the drama of this crime did not seem over so far as the community was concerned. So complicated a case gave rise, as usually happens under such circumstances, to two sets of diametrically opposite opinions as to the guilt of the hero, whom some declared to be an innocent and ill-used victim, and others the worst of criminals.

The liberals held to Tascheron's innocence, less from conviction than for the satisfaction of opposing the government.

"What an outrage," they said, "to condemn a man because his footprint is the size of another man's footprint; or because he will not tell where he spent the night, as if all young men would not rather die than compromise a woman. They prove he borrowed tools and bought iron, but have they proved he made that key? They find a bit of blue linen hanging to the branch of a tree, possibly put there by old Pingret himself to scare the crows, though it happens to match a tear in Tascheron's blouse. Is a man's life to depend on such things as these? Jean-François denies everything, and the prosecution has not produced a single witness who saw the crime or anything relating to it."

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They talked over, enlarged upon, and paraphrased the arguments of the defence. "Old Pingret! what was he? — a cracked money-box!" said the strong-minded. A few of the more determined progressists, denying the sacred laws of property, which the Saint-Simonians were already attacking under their abstract theories of political economy, went further.

"Père Pingret," they said, "was the real author of the crime. By hoarding his gold that man robbed the nation. What enterprises might have been made fruitful by his useless money! He had barred the way of industry, and was justly punished."

They pitied the poor murdered servant-woman, but Denise, Tascheron's sister, who resisted the wiles of lawyers and did not give a single answer at the trial without long consideration of what she ought to say, excited the deepest interest. She became in their minds a figure to be compared (though in another sense) with Jeannie Deans, whose piety, grace, modesty and beauty she possessed.

François Tascheron continued, therefore, to excite the curiosity of not only all the town but all the department, and a few romantic women openly testified their admiration for him.

"If there is really in all this a love for some woman high above him," they said, "then he is surely no ordinary man, and you will see that he will die well."

The question, "Will he speak out, — will he not speak?" gave rise to many a bet.

Since the burst of rage with which Tascheron received his sentence, and which was so violent that it might have been fatal to persons about him in the

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court-room if the gendarmes had not been there to master him, the condemned man threatened all who came near him with the fury of a wild beast; so that the jailers were obliged to put him into a strait-jacket, as much to protect his life as their own from the effects of his anger. Prevented by that controlling power from doing violence, Tascheron gave vent to his despair by convulsive jerks which horrified his guardians, and by words and looks which the middle-ages would have attributed to demoniacal possession. He was so young that many women thought pitifully of a life so full of passion about to be cut off forever. "The Last Day of a Condemned Man," that mournful elegy, that useless plea against the penalty of death (the mainstay of society!), which had lately been published, as if expressly to meet this case, was the topic of all conversations.

But, above all, in the mind of every one, stood that invisible unknown woman, her feet in blood, raised aloft by the trial as it were on a pedestal, — torn, no doubt, by horrible inward anguish and condemned to absolute silence within her home. Who was this Medea whom the public well-nigh admired, — the woman with that impenetrable brow, that white breast covering a heart of steel? Perhaps she was the sister or the cousin or the daughter or the wife of this one or of that one among them! Alarm seemed to creep into the bosom of families. As Napoleon finely said, it is especially in the domain of the imagination that the power of the Unknown is immeasurable.

As for the hundred thousand francs stolen from Monsieur and Madame des Vanneaulx no efforts of

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the police could find them; and the obstinate silence of the criminal gave no clue. Monsieur de Grandville tried the common means of holding out hopes of commutation of the sentence in case of confession; but when he went to see the prisoner and suggest it the latter received him with such furious cries and epileptic contortions, such rage at being powerless to take him by the throat, that he could do nothing.

The law could only look to the influence of the Church at the last moment. The des Vanneaulx had frequently consulted with the Abbé Pascal, chaplain of the prison. This priest was not without the faculty of making prisoners listen to him, and he religiously braved Tascheron's violence, trying to get in a few words amid the storms of that powerful nature in convulsion. But this struggle of spiritual fatherhood against the hurricane of unchained passions, overcame the poor abbé completely.

"The man has had his paradise here below," said the old man, in his gentle voice.

Little Madame des Vanneaulx consulted her friends as to whether she ought to try a visit herself to the criminal. Monsieur des Vanneaulx talked of offering terms. In his anxiety to recover the money he actually went to Monsieur de Grandville and asked for the pardon of his uncle's murderer if the latter would make restitution of the hundred thousand francs. The *procureur-général* replied that the majesty of the crown did not stoop to such compromises.

The des Vanneaulx then had recourse to the lawyer who had defended Tascheron, and to him they offered ten per cent of whatever sum he could recover. This

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lawyer was the only person before whom Tascheron was not violent. The heirs authorized him to offer the prisoner an additional ten per cent to be paid to his family. In spite of all these inducements and his own eloquence, the lawyer could obtain nothing whatever from his client. The des Vanneaulx were furious; they anathematized the unhappy man.

"He is not only a murderer, but he has no sense of decency," cried Madame des Vanneaulx (ignorant of Fualdès' famous complaint), when she received word of the failure of the Abbé Pascal's efforts, and was told there was no hope of a reversal of the sentence by the court of appeals.

"What good will our money do him in the place he is going to?" said her husband. "Murder can be conceived of, but useless theft is inconceivable. What days we live in, to be sure! To think that people in good society actually take an interest in such a wretch!"

"He has no honor," said Madame des Vanneaulx.

"But perhaps the restitution would compromise the woman he loves," said an old maid.

"We would keep his secret," returned Monsieur des Vanneaulx.

"Then you would be compounding a felony," remarked a lawyer.

"Oh, the villain!" was Monsieur des Vanneaulx's usual conclusion.

One of Madame Graslin's female friends related to her with much amusement these discussions of the des Vanneaulx. This lady, who was very intelligent, and one of those persons who form ideals and desire that

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all things should attain perfection, regretted the violence and savage temper of the condemned; she would rather he had been cold and calm and dignified, she said.

"Do you not see," replied Véronique, "that he is thus avoiding their temptations and foiling their efforts? He is making himself a wild beast for a purpose."

"At any rate," said the lady, "he is not a well-bred man; he is only a workman."

"If he had been a well-bred man," said Madame Graslin, "he would soon have sacrificed that unknown woman."

These events, discussed and turned and twisted in every salon, every household, commented on in a score of ways, stripped bare by the cleverest tongues in the community, gave, of course, a cruel interest to the execution of the criminal, whose appeal was rejected after two months' delay by the upper court. What would probably be his demeanor in his last moments? Would he speak out? Would he contradict himself? How would the bets be decided? Who would go to see him executed, and who would not go, and how could it be done? The position of the localities, which in Limoges spares a criminal the anguish of a long distance to the scaffold, lessens the number of spectators. The law courts which adjoin the prison stand at the corner of the rue du Palais and the rue du Pont-Hérisson. The rue du Palais is continued in a straight line by the short rue de Monte-à-Regret, which leads to the place des Arènes, where the executions take place, and which probably owes its name to that circumstance. There is therefore but little distance to go, few houses to

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pass, and few windows to look from. No person in good society would be willing to mingle in the crowd which would fill the streets.

But the expected execution was, to the great astonishment of the whole town, put off from day to day for the following reason: —

The repentance and resignation of great criminals on their way to death is one of the triumphs which the Church reserves for itself, — a triumph which seldom misses its effect on the popular mind. Repentance is so strong a proof of the power of religious ideas — taken apart from all Christian interest, though that, of course, is the chief object of the Church — that the clergy are always distressed by a failure on such occasions. In July, 1829, such a failure was aggravated by the spirit of party which envenomed every detail in the life of the body politic. The liberal party rejoiced in the expectation that the priest-party (a term invented by Montlosier, a royalist who went over to the constitutionals and was dragged by them far beyond his wishes), — that the priests would fail on so public an occasion before the eyes of the people. Parties *en masse* commit infamous actions which would cover a single man with shame and opprobrium; therefore when one man alone stands in his guilt before the eyes of the masses, he becomes a Robespierre, a Jeffries, a Laubardemont, a species of expiatory altar on which all secret guilts hang their *ex-votos*.

The authorities, sympathizing with the Church, delayed the execution, partly in the hope of gaining some conclusive information for themselves, and partly to allow religion an opportunity to prevail.

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Nevertheless, their power was not unlimited, and the sentence must sooner or later be carried out. The same liberals who, out of mere opposition, had declared Tascheron innocent, and who had done their best to break down the verdict, now clamored because the sentence was not executed. When the opposition is consistent it invariably falls into such unreasonableness, because its object is not to have right on its own side, but to harass the authorities and put them in the wrong.

Accordingly, about the beginning of August, the government officials felt their hand forced by that clamor, often so stupid, called "public opinion." The day for the execution was named. In this extremity the Abbé Dutheil took upon himself to propose to the bishop a last resource, the adoption of which caused the introduction into this judicial drama of a remarkable personage, who serves as bond between all the figures brought upon the scene of it, and who, by ways familiar to Providence, was destined to lead Madame Graslin along a path where her virtues were to shine with greater brilliancy as a noble benefactress and an angelic Christian woman.

The episcopal palace at Limoges stands on a hill which slopes to the banks of the Vienne; and its gardens, supported by strong walls topped with a balustrade, descend to the river by terrace after terrace, according to the natural lay of the land. The rise of this hill is such that the suburb of Saint-Étienne on the opposite bank seems to lie at the foot of the lower terrace. From there, according to the direction in which a person walks, the Vienne can be seen either in a long

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stretch or directly across it, in the midst of a fertile panorama. On the west, after the river leaves the embankment of the episcopal gardens, it turns toward the town in a graceful curve which winds around the suburb of Saint-Martial. At a short distance beyond that suburb is a pretty country house called Le Cluseau, the walls of which can be seen from the lower terrace of the bishop's palace, appearing, by an effect of distance, to blend with the steeples of the suburb. Opposite to Le Cluseau is the sloping island, covered with poplar and other trees, which Véronique in her girlish youth had named the Île de France. To the east the distance is closed by an amphitheatre of hills.

The magic charm of the site and the rich simplicity of the building make this episcopal palace one of the most interesting objects in a town where the other edifices do not shine, either through choice of material or architecture.

Long familiarized with the aspects which commend these gardens to all lovers of the picturesque, the Abbé Dutheil, who had induced the Abbé de Grancour to accompany him, descended from terrace to terrace, paying no attention to the ruddy colors, the orange tones, the violet tints, which the setting sun was casting on the old walls and balustrades of the gardens, on the river beneath them, and, in the distance, on the houses of the town. He was in search of the bishop, who was sitting on the lower terrace under a grape-vine arbor, where he often came to take his dessert and enjoy the charm of a tranquil evening. The poplars on the island seemed at this moment to divide the waters with the lengthening shadow of their yellowing heads, to which

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the sun was lending the appearance of a golden foliage, The setting rays, diversely reflected on masses of different greens, produced a magnificent harmony of melancholy tones. At the farther end of the valley a sheet of sparkling water ruffled by the breeze brought out the brown stretch of roofs in the suburb of Saint-Étienne. The steeples and roofs of Saint-Martial, bathed in light, showed through the tracery of the grape-vine arbor. The soft murmur of the provincial town, half hidden by the bend of the river, the sweetness of the balmy air, all contributed to plunge the prelate into the condition of quietude prescribed by medical writers on digestion; seemingly his eyes were resting mechanically on the right bank of the river, just where the long shadows of the island poplars touched it on the side toward Saint-Étienne, near the field where the twofold murder of old Pingret and his servant had been committed. But when his momentary felicity was interrupted by the arrival of the two grand vicars, and the difficulties they brought to him to solve, it was seen his eyes were filled with impenetrable thoughts. The two priests attributed this abstraction to the fact of being bored, whereas, on the contrary, the prelate was absorbed in seeing in the sands of the Vienne the solution of the enigma then so anxiously sought for by the officers of justice, the des Vanneaulx, and the community at large.

"Monseigneur," said the Abbé de Grancour, approaching the bishop, "it is all useless; we shall certainly have the distress of seeing that unhappy Tascheron die an unbeliever. He vociferates the most horrible imprecations against religion; he insults that

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poor Abbé Pascal; he spits upon the crucifix; and means to die denying all, even hell."

"He will shock the populace on the scaffold," said the Abbé Dutheil. "The great scandal and horror his conduct will excite may hide our defeat and powerlessness. In fact, as I have just been saying to Monsieur de Grancour, this very spectacle may drive other sinners into the arms of the Church."

Troubled by these words, the bishop laid down upon a rustic wooden table the bunch of grapes at which he was picking, and wiped his fingers as he made a sign to the two grand vicars to be seated.

"The Abbé Pascal did not take a wise course," he said.

"He is actually ill in his bed from the effects of his last scene with the man," said the Abbé de Grancour. "If it were not for that we might get him to explain more clearly the difficulties that have defeated all the various efforts monseigneur ordered him to make."

"The condemned man sings obscene songs at the highest pitch of his voice as soon as he sees any one of us, so as to drown every word we try to say to him," said a young priest who was sitting beside the bishop.

This young man, who was gifted with a charming personality, had his right arm resting on the table, while his white hand dropped negligently on the bunches of grapes, seeking the ripest, with the ease and assurance of an habitual guest or a favorite. He was both to the prelate, being the younger brother of Baron Eugène de Rastignac, to whom ties of family and also of affection had long bound the Bishop of Limoges. Aware of the want of fortune which devoted this young man to the

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Church, the bishop took him as his private secretary to give him time to wait for eventual preferment. The Abbé Gabriel bore a name which would lead him sooner or later to the highest dignities of the Church.

"Did you go to see him, my son?" asked the bishop.

"Yes, Monseigneur. As soon as I entered his cell the wretched man hurled the most disgusting epithets at you and at me. He behaved in such a manner that it was impossible for any priest to remain in his presence. Might I give Monseigneur a word of advice?"

"Let us listen to the words of wisdom which God Almighty sometimes puts into the mouths of children," said the bishop, smiling.

"Well, you know he made Balaam's ass speak out," said the young abbé quickly.

"But according to some commentators she did not know what she was saying," replied the bishop, laughing.

The two grand vicars smiled. In the first place, the joke came from Monseigneur; next, it bore gently on the young abbé, of whom the dignitaries and other ambitious priests grouped around the bishop were somewhat jealous.

"My advice would be," resumed the young man, "to ask Monsieur de Grandville to reprieve the man for the present. When Tascheron knows that he owes an extension of his life to our intercession, he may pretend to listen to us, and if he listens —"

"He will persist in his present conduct, finding that it has won him that advantage," said the bishop, interrupting his favorite. "Messieurs," he said, after a

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moment's silence, "does the whole town know of these details?"

"There is not a household in which they are not talked over," said the Abbé de Grancour. "The state in which our good Abbé Pascal was put by his last efforts is the present topic of conversation throughout the town."

"When is Tascheron to be executed?" asked the bishop.

"To-morrow, which is market-day;" replied Monsieur de Grancour.

"Messieurs," exclaimed the bishop, "religion must not be overset in this way. The more public attention is attracted to the matter, the more I am determined to obtain a notable triumph. The Church is now in presence of a great difficulty. We are called upon to do miracles in this manufacturing town, where the spirit of sedition against religious and monarchical principles has such deep root, where the system of inquiry born of protestantism (which in these days calls itself liberalism, prepared at any moment to take another name) extends into everything. Go at once to Monsieur de Grandville; he is wholly on our side, and say to him from me that we beg for a few days' reprieve. I will go myself and see that unhappy man."

"You, Monseigneur!" said the Abbé de Rastignac. "If you should fail, would n't that complicate matters? You ought not to go unless you are certain of success."

"If Monseigneur will permit me to express my opinion," said the Abbé Dutheil, "I think I can suggest a means which may bring victory to religion in this sad case."



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The prelate answered with a sign of assent, so coldly given as to show how little credit he gave to his vicar-general.

"If any one can influence that rebellious soul and bring it back to God," continued the Abbé Dutheil, "it is the rector of the village in which he was born, Monsieur Bonnet."

"One of your protégés," remarked the bishop.

"Monseigneur, Monsieur Bonnet is one of those men who protect themselves, both by their active virtues and their gospel work."

This simple and modest reply was received in a silence which would have embarrassed any other man than the Abbé Dutheil. The three priests chose to see in it one of those hidden and unanswerable sarcasms which are characteristic of ecclesiastics, who contrive to express what they want to say while observing the strictest decorum. In this case there was nothing of the kind. The Abbé Dutheil never thought of himself and had no double meaning.

"I have heard of Saint Aristides for some time," said the bishop, smiling. "If I have left his light under a bushel I may have been unjust or prejudiced. Your liberals are always crying up Monsieur Bonnet as though he belonged to their party. I should like to judge for myself of this rural apostle. Go at once, messieurs, to Monsieur de Grandville, and ask for the reprieve; I will await his answer before sending our dear Abbé Gabriel to Montégnac to fetch the saintly man. We will give his Blessedness a chance to do miracles."

As he listened to these words of the prelate the Abbé

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Dutheil reddened; but he would not allow himself to take notice of the incivilities of the speech. The two grand vicars bowed in silence and withdrew, leaving the prelate alone with his secretary.

"The secrets of the confession we are so anxious to obtain from the unhappy man himself are no doubt buried there," said the bishop to his young abbé, pointing to the shadow of the poplars where it fell on a lonely house between the island and Saint-Étienne.

"I have always thought so," replied Gabriel. "I am not a judge and I will not be an informer; but if I were a magistrate I should have known the name of that woman who trembles at every sound, at every word, while forced to keep her features calm and serene under pain of going to the scaffold with her lover. She has nothing to fear, however. I have seen the man; he will carry the secret of that passionate love to the grave with him."

"Ah! you sly fellow!" said the bishop, twisting the ear of his secretary as he motioned to the space between the island and the suburb of Saint-Étienne which the last gleams of the setting sun were illuminating, and on which the young abbé's eyes were fixed. "That is the place where justice should have searched; don't you think so?"

"I went to see the criminal to try the effect of my suspicions upon him," replied the young man. "I could not speak them out, for fear of compromising the woman for whose sake he dies."

"Yes," said the bishop, "we will hold our tongues; we are not the servants of human justice. One head is enough. Besides, sooner or later, the secret will be given to the Church."

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The perspicacity which the habit of meditation gives to priests is far superior to that of lawyers or the police. By dint of contemplating from those terraces the scene of the crime, the prelate and his secretary had ended by perceiving circumstances unseen by others, in spite of all the investigations before and during the trial of the case.

Monsieur de Grandville was playing whist at Madame Graslin's house; it was necessary to await his return; the bishop did not therefore receive his answer till nearly midnight. The Abbé Gabriel, to whom the prelate lent his carriage, started at two in the morning for Montégnac. This region, which begins about twenty-five miles from the town, is situated in that part of the Limousin which lies at the base of the mountains of the Corrèze and follows the line of the Creuze. The young abbé left Limoges all heaving with expectation of the spectacle on the morrow, and still unaware that it would not take place.

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## VII.

### MONTÉGNAC.

Priests and religious devotees have a tendency in the matter of payments to keep strictly to the letter of the law. Is this from poverty, or from the selfishness to which their isolation condemns them, thus encouraging the natural inclination of all men to avarice; or is it from a conscientious parsimony which saves all it can for deeds of charity? Each nature will give a different answer to this question. The difficulty of putting the hand into the pocket, sometimes concealed by a gracious kindliness, oftener unreservedly exhibited, is more particularly noticeable in travelling. Gabriel de Rastignac, the prettiest youth who had served before the altar for many a long day, gave only a thirty-sous *pour-boire* to the postilion. Consequently he travelled slowly. Postilions drive bishops and other clergy with the utmost care when they merely double the legal wage, and they run no risk of damaging the episcopal carriage for any such sum, fearing, they might say, to get themselves into trouble. The Abbé Gabriel, who was travelling alone for the first time, said, at each relay, in his dulcet voice: —

"Pray go faster, postilion."

"We ply the whip," replied an old postilion, "according to how the traveller plies his finger and thumb."

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The young abbé flung himself back into a corner of the carriage unable to comprehend that answer. To occupy the time he began to study the country through which he was passing, making several mental excursions on foot among the hills through which the road winds between Bordeaux and Lyon.

About fifteen miles from Limoges the landscape, losing the graceful flow of the Vienne through the undulating meadows of the Limousin, which in certain places remind one of Switzerland, especially about Saint-Léonard, takes on a harsh and melancholy aspect. Here we come upon vast tracts of uncultivated land, sandy plains without herbage, hemmed in on the horizon by the summits of the Corrèze. These mountains have neither the abrupt rise of the Alpine ranges nor their splendid ridges; neither the warm gorges and desolate peaks of the Apennines, nor the picturesque grandeur of the Pyrenees. Their undulating slopes, due to the action of water, prove the subsidence of some great natural catastrophe in which the floods retired slowly. This characteristic, common to most of the earth convulsions in France, has perhaps contributed, together with the climate, to the epitaph of *douce* bestowed by all Europe on our sunny France.

Though this abrupt transition from the smiling landscapes of the Limousin to the sterner aspects of La Marche and Auvergne may offer to the thinker and the poet, as he passes them on his way, an image of the Infinite, that terror of certain minds; though it incites to revery the woman of the world, bored as she travels luxuriously in her carriage, — to the inhabitants of this region Nature is cruel, savage, and without

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resources. The soil of these great gray plains is thankless. The vicinity of a capital town could alone reproduce the miracle worked in Brie during the last two centuries. Here, however, not only is a town lacking, but also the great residences which sometimes give life to these hopeless deserts, where civilization languishes, where the agriculturist sees only barrenness, and the traveller finds not a single inn, nor that which, perchance, he is there to seek, — the picturesque.

Great minds, however, do not dislike these barren wastes, necessary shadows in Nature's vast picture. Quite recently Fenimore Cooper has magnificently developed with his melancholy genius the poesy of such solitudes, in his "Prairie." These regions, unknown to botanists, covered by mineral refuse, round pebbles, and a sterile soil, cast defiance to civilization. France should adopt the only solution to these difficulties, as the British have done in Scotland, where patient, heroic agriculture has changed the arid wastes into fertile farms. Left in their savage and primitive state these uncultivated social and natural wastes give birth to discouragement, laziness, weakness resulting from poor food, and crime when needs become importunate.

These few words present the past history of Montégnac. What could be done in that great tract of barren land, neglected by the government, abandoned by the nobility, useless to industry, — what but war against society which disregarded its duty? Consequently, the inhabitants of Montégnac lived to a recent period, as the Highlanders of Scotland lived in former times, by murder and rapine. From the mere aspect of this region a thinking man would under-

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stand how, twenty years earlier, the inhabitants were at war with society. The great upland plain, flanked on one side by the valley of the Vienne, on the other by the charming valleys of La Marche, then by Auvergne, and bounded by the mountains of the Corrèze, is like (agriculture apart) the plateau of La Beauce, which separates the basin of the Loire from that of the Seine, also like those of Touraine and Berry, and many other of the great upland plains which are cut like facets on the surface of France and are numerous enough to claim the attention of the wisest administrators. It is amazing that while complaint is made of the influx of population to the social centres, the government does not employ the natural remedy of redeeming a region where, as statistics show, there are many million acres of waste land, certain parts of which, especially in Berry, have a soil from seven to eight feet deep.

Many of these plains which might be covered by villages and made splendidly productive belong to obstinate communes, the authorities of which refuse to sell to those who would develop them, merely to keep the right to pasture cows upon them! On all these useless, unproductive lands is written the word "Incapacity." All soils have some special fertility of their own. Arms and wills are ready; the thing lacking is a sense of duty combined with talent on the part of the government. In France, up to the present time, these upland plains have been sacrificed to the valleys; the government has chosen to give all its help to those regions of country which can take care of themselves.

Most of these luckless uplands are without water,

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the first essential for production. The mists which ought to fertilize the gray, dead soil by discharging oxygen upon it, sweep across it rapidly, driven by the wind, for want of trees which might arrest them and so obtain their nourishment. Merely to plant trees in such a region would be carrying a gospel to it. Separated from the nearest town or city by a distance as insurmountable to poor folk as though a desert lay between them, with no means of reaching a market for their products (if they produced anything), close to an unexplored forest which supplied them with wood and the uncertain livelihood of poaching, the inhabitants often suffered from hunger during the winters. The soil not being suitable for wheat, and the unfortunate peasantry having neither cattle of any kind nor farming implements, they lived for the most part on chestnuts.

Any one who has studied zoological productions in a museum, or become personally aware of the indescribable depression caused by the brown tones of all European products, will understand how the constant sight of these gray, arid plains must have affected the moral nature of the inhabitants, through the desolate sense of utter barrenness which they present to the eye. There, in those dismal regions, is neither coolness nor brightness, nor shade nor contrast, — none of all those ideas and spectacles of Nature which awaken and rejoice the heart; even a stunted apple-tree would be hailed as a friend.

A country road, recently made, runs through the centre of this great plain, and meets the high-road. Upon it, at a distance of some fifteen miles from the high-road,

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stands Montégnac, at the foot of a hill, as its name designates, the chief town of a canton or district in the Haute-Vienne. The hill is part of Montégnac, which thus unites a mountainous scenery with that of the plains. This district is a miniature Scotland, with its lowlands and highlands. Behind the hill, at the foot of which lies the village, rises, at a distance of about three miles, the first peak of the Corrèze mountains. The space between is covered by the great forest of Montégnac, which clothes the hill, extends over the valley, and along the slopes of the mountain (though these are bare in some places), continuing as far as the highway to Aubusson, where it diminishes to a point near a steep embankment on that road. This embankment commands a ravine through which the post-road between Bordeaux and Lyon passes. Travellers, either afoot or in carriages, were often stopped in the depths of this dangerous gorge by highwaymen, whose deeds of violence went unpunished, for the site favored them; they could instantly disappear, by ways known to them alone, into the inaccessible parts of the forest.

Such a region was naturally out of reach of law. No one now travelled through it. Without circulation, neither commerce, industry, exchange of ideas, nor any of the means to wealth, can exist; the material triumphs of civilization are always the result of the application of primitive ideas. Thought is invariably the point of departure and the goal of all social existence. The history of Montégnac is a proof of that axiom of social science. When at last the administration was able to concern itself with the needs and the material prosperity of this region of country, it cut down this

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strip of forest, and stationed a detachment of gendarmerie near the ravine, which escorted the mail-coaches between the two relays; but, to the shame of the gendarmerie be it said, it was the gospel, and not the sword, the rector Monsieur Bonnet, and not Corporal Chervin, who won a civil victory by changing the morals of a population. This priest, filled with Christian tenderness for the poor, hapless region, attempted to regenerate it, and succeeded in the attempt.

After travelling for about an hour over these plains, alternately stony and dusty, where the partridges flocked in tranquil coveys, their wings whirring with a dull, heavy sound as the carriage came toward them, the Abbé Gabriel, like all other travellers on the same road, saw with satisfaction the roofs of Montégnac in the distance. At the entrance of the village was one of those curious post-relays which are seen only in the remote parts of France. Its sign was an oak board on which some pretentious postilion had carved the words, *Pauste o chevos*, blackening the letters with ink, and then nailing the board by its four corners above the door of a wretched stable in which there were no horses. The door, which was nearly always open, had a plank laid on the soil for its threshold, to protect the stable floor, which was lower than the road, from inundation when it rained. The discouraged traveller could see within worn-out, mildewed, and mended harnesses, certain to break at a plunge of the horses. The horses themselves were at work in the fields, or anywhere but in the stable. If by any chance they happen to be in their stalls, they are eating; if they have finished eating, the postilion has gone to see his

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aunt or his cousin, or is getting in the hay, or else he is asleep; no one can say where he is; the traveller has to wait till he is found, and he never comes till he has finished what he is about. When he does come he loses an immense amount of time looking for his jacket and his whip, or putting the collars on his horses. Near by, at the door of the post-house, a worthy woman is fuming even more than the traveller, in order to prevent the latter from complaining loudly. This is sure to be the wife of the post-master, whose husband is away in the fields.

The bishop's secretary left his carriage before a post-house of this kind, the walls of which resembled a geographical map, while the thatched roof, blooming like a flower-garden, seemed to be giving way beneath the weight of stone-crop. After begging the post-mistress to have everything in readiness for his departure in an hour's time, the abbé asked the way to the parsonage. The good woman showed him a lane which led to the church, telling him the rectory was close beside it.

While the young abbé followed this lane, which was full of stones and closed on either side by hedges, the post-mistress questioned the postilion. Since starting from Limoges each postilion had informed his successor of the conjectures of the Limoges postilion as to the mission of the bishop's messenger. While the inhabitants of the town were getting out of bed and talking of the coming execution, a rumor spread among the country people that the bishop had obtained the pardon of the innocent man; and much was said about the mistakes to which human justice was liable. If

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Jean-François was executed later, it is certain that he was regarded in the country regions as a martyr.

After taking a few steps along the lane, reddened by the autumn leaves, and black with mulberries and damsons, the Abbé Gabriel turned round with the instinctive impulse which leads us all to make acquaintance with a region which we see for the first time, — a sort of instinctive physical curiosity shared by dogs and horses.

The position of Montégnac was explained to him as his eyes rested on various little streams flowing down the hillsides and on a little river, along the bank of which runs the county road which connects the chief town of the arrondissement with the prefecture. Like all the villages of this upland plain, Montégnac is built of earth baked in the sun and moulded into square blocks. After a fire a house looks as if it had been built of brick. The roofs are of thatch. Poverty is everywhere visible.

Before the village lay several fields of potatoes, radishes, and rye, redeemed from the barren plain. On the slope of the hill were irrigated meadows where the inhabitants raised horses, the famous Limousin breed, which is said to be a legacy of the Arabs when they descended by the Pyrenees into France and were cut to pieces by the battle-axes of the Franks under Charles Martel. The heights are barren. A hot, baked, reddish soil shows a region where chestnuts flourish. The springs, carefully applied to irrigation, water the meadows only, nourishing the sweet, crisp grass, so fine and choice, which produces this race of delicate and high-strung horses, — not over-strong to bear fatigue, but showy, excellent for the country of their birth, though

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subject to changes if transplanted. A few mulberry trees lately imported showed an intention of cultivating silk-worms.

Like most of the villages in this world Montégnac had but one street, through which the high road passed. Nevertheless there was an upper and a lower Montégnac, reached by lanes going up or going down from the main street. A line of houses standing along the brow of the hill presented the cheerful sight of terraced gardens, which were entered by flights of steps from the main street. Some had their steps of earth, others of pebbles; here and there old women were sitting on them, knitting or watching children, and keeping up a conversation from the upper to the lower town across the usually peaceful street of the little village; thus rumors spread easily and rapidly in Montégnac. All the gardens, which were full of fruit-trees, cabbages, onions, and other vegetables, had bee-hives along their terraces.

Another line of houses, running down from the main street to the river, the course of which was outlined by thriving fields of hemp and the sorts of fruit trees which like moisture, lay parallel with the upper town; some of the houses, that of the post-house, for instance, were in a hollow, and were well-situated for certain kinds of work, such as weaving. Nearly all of them were shaded by walnut-trees, the tree *par excellence* of strong soils.

On this side of the main street at the end farthest from the great plain was a dwelling-house, very much larger and better cared for than those in other parts of the village; around it were other houses equally well

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kept. This little hamlet, separated from the village by its gardens, was already called Les Tascherons, a name it keeps to the present day.

The village itself amounted to very little, but thirty or more outlying farms belonged to it. In the valley, leading down to the river, irrigating channels like those of La Marche and Berry indicated the flow of water around the village by the green fringe of verdure about them; Montégnac seemed tossed in their midst like a vessel at sea. When a house, an estate, a village, a region, passes from a wretched condition to a prosperous one, without becoming either rich or splendid, life seems so easy, so natural to living beings, that the spectator may not at once suspect the enormous labor, infinite in petty detail, grand in persistency like the toil buried in a foundation wall, in short, the forgotten labor on which the whole structure rests.

Consequently the scene that lay before him told nothing extraordinary to the young Abbé Gabriel as his eye took in the charming landscape. He knew nothing of the state of the region before the arrival of the rector, Monsieur Bonnet. The young man now went on a few steps and again saw, several hundred feet above the gardens of the upper village, the church and the parsonage, which he had seen already from a distance confusedly mingling with the imposing ruins clothed with creepers of the old castle of Montégnac, one of the residences of the Navarreins family in the twelfth century.

The parsonage, a house originally built no doubt for the bailiff or game-keeper, was noticeable for a long raised terrace planted with lindens from which a fine

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view extended over the country. The steps leading to this terrace and the walls which supported it showed their great age by the ravages of time. The flat moss which clings to stones had laid its dragon-green carpet on each surface. The numerous families of the pellitories, the chamomiles, the mesembryanthemums, pushed their varied and abundant tufts through the loop-holes in the walls, cracked and fissured in spite of their thickness. Botany had lavished there its most elegant drapery of ferns of all kinds, snap-dragons with their violet mouths and golden pistils, the blue anchusa, the brown lichens, so that the old worn stones seemed mere accessories peeping out at intervals from this fresh growth. Along the terrace a box hedge, cut into geometric figures, inclosed a pleasure garden surrounding the parsonage, above which the rock rose like a white wall surmounted by slender trees that drooped and swayed above it like plumes.

The ruins of the castle looked down upon the house and church. The house, built of pebbles and mortar, had but one story surmounted by an enormous sloping roof with gable ends, in which were attics, no doubt empty, considering the dilapidation of their windows. The ground-floor had two rooms parted by a corridor, at the farther end of which was a wooden staircase leading to the second floor, which also had two rooms. A little kitchen was at the back of the building in a yard, where were the stable and coach-house, both unused, deserted, and worthless. The kitchen garden lay between the church and the house; a ruined gallery led from the parsonage to the sacristy.

When the young abbé saw the four windows with

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their leaded panes, the brown and mossy walls, the door in common pine slit like a bundle of matches, far from being attracted by the adorable naïveté of these details, the grace of the vegetations which draped the roof and the dilapidated wooden frames of the windows, the wealth of clambering plants escaping from every cranny, and the clasping tendrils of the grape-vine which looked into every window as if to bring smiling ideas to those within, he congratulated himself heartily on being a bishop in perspective instead of a village rector.

This house, apparently always open, seemed to belong to everybody. The Abbé Gabriel entered a room communicating with the kitchen, which was poorly furnished with an oak table on four stout legs, a tapestried armchair, a number of chairs all of wood, and an old chest by way of buffet. No one was in the kitchen except a cat which revealed the presence of a woman about the house. The other room served as a salon. Casting a glance about it the young priest noticed armchairs in natural wood covered with tapestry; the woodwork and the rafters of the ceiling were of chestnut which had turned as black as ebony. A tall clock in a green case painted with flowers, a table with a faded green cloth, several chairs, two candlesticks on the chimney-piece, between which was an Infant Jesus in wax under a glass case, completed the furniture of the room. The chimney-piece of wood with common mouldings was filled by a fire-board covered by a painting representing the Good Shepherd with a lamb over his shoulder, which was probably the gift of some young girl, — the mayor's daughter, or the



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judge's daughter, — in return for the pastor's care of her education.

The forlorn condition of the house was distressing to behold; the walls, once whitewashed, were now discolored, and stained to a man's height by constant friction. The staircase with its heavy baluster and wooden steps, though very clean, looked as if it might easily give way under the feet. On the other side of the house, opposite to the entrance door, another door opening upon the kitchen garden enabled the Abbé de Rastignac to judge of the narrowness of that garden, which was closed at the back by a wall cut in the white and friable stone side of the mountain, against which espaliers were fastened, covered with grape-vines and fruit-trees so ill taken care of that their leaves were discolored with blight.

The abbé returned upon his steps and walked along the paths of the first garden, from which he could see, in the distance beyond the village, the magnificent stretch of valley, a true oasis at the edge of the vast plains, which now, veiled by the light mists of morning, lay along the horizon like a tranquil ocean. Behind him could be seen, on one side, for a foil, the dark masses of the bronze-green forest; on the other, the church and the ruins of the castle perched on the rock and vividly detached upon the blue of the ether. The Abbé Gabriel, his feet creaking on the gravelly paths cut in stars and rounds and lozenges, looked down upon the village, where some of the inhabitants were already gazing up at him, and then at the fresh, cool valley, with its tangled paths, its river bordered with willows in delightful contrast to the endless plain, and

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*"A little girl, employed, no doubt, to watch the house, heard the steps of a man with creaking shoes on the great square flags of the ground-floor rooms."*

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Laurent Desrousseaux. Copyright 1896 by Roberts Bros. Procédé Goupil

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he was suddenly seized by sensations which changed the nature of his thoughts; he admired the sweet tranquillity of the place; he felt the influence of that pure air; he was conscious of the peace inspired by the revelation of a life brought back to Biblical simplicity, he saw, confusedly, the beauties of this old parsonage which he now re-entered to examine its details with greater interest.

A little girl, employed, no doubt, to watch the house, though she was picking and eating fruit in the garden, heard the steps of a man with creaking shoes on the great square flags of the ground-floor rooms. She ran in to see who it was. Confused at being caught by a priest with a fruit in one hand and another in her mouth, she made no answer to the questions of the handsome young abbé. She had never imagined such an abbé, — dapper and spruce as hands could make him, in dazzling linen and fine black cloth without spot or wrinkle.

"Monsieur Bonnet?" she said at last. "Monsieur Bonnet is saying mass, and Mademoiselle Ursule is at church."

The Abbé Gabriel did not notice a covered way from the house to the church; he went back to the road which led to the front portal, a species of porch with a sloping roof that faced the village. It was reached by a series of disjointed stone steps, at the side of which lay a ravine washed out by the mountain torrents and covered with noble elms planted by Sully the Protestant. This church, one of the poorest in France where there are many poor churches, was like one of those enormous barns with projecting doors covered by roofs

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supported on brick or wooden pillars. Built, like the parsonage, of cobblestones and mortar, flanked by a face of solid rock, and roofed by the commonest round tiles, this church was decorated on the outside with the richest creations of sculpture, rich in light and shade and lavishly massed and colored by Nature, who understands such art as well as any Michael Angelo. Ivy clasped the walls with its nervous tendrils, showing stems amid its foliage like the veins on a lay figure. This mantle, flung by Time to cover the wounds he made, was starred by autumn flowers drooping from the crevices, which also gave shelter to numerous singing birds. The rose-window above the projecting porch was adorned with blue campanula, like the first page of an illuminated missal. The side which communicated with the parsonage, toward the north, was not less decorated; the wall was gray and red with moss and lichen; but the other side and the apse, around which lay the cemetery, was covered with a wealth of varied bloom. A few trees, among others an almond-tree — one of the emblems of hope — had taken root in the broken wall; two enormous pines standing close against the apsis served as lightning-rods. The cemetery, inclosed by a low, half-ruined wall, had for ornament an iron cross, mounted on a pedestal and hung with box, blessed at Easter, — one of those affecting Christian thoughts forgotten in cities. The village rector is the only priest who, in these days, thinks to go among his dead and say to them each Easter morn, "Thou shalt live again!" Here and there a few rotten wooden crosses stood up from the grassy mounds.

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The interior of the church harmonized perfectly with the poetic tangle of the humble exterior, the luxury and art of which was bestowed by Time, for once in a way charitable. Within, the eye first went to the roof, lined with chestnut, to which age had given the richest tints of the oldest woods of Europe. This roof was supported at equal distances by strong shafts resting on transversal beams. The four white-washed walls had no ornament whatever. Poverty had made the parish iconoclastic, whether it would or not. The church, paved and furnished with benches, was lighted by four arched windows with leaded panes. The altar, shaped like a tomb, was adorned by a large crucifix placed above a tabernacle in walnut with a few gilt mouldings, kept clean and shining, eight candlesticks economically made of wood painted white, and two china vases filled with artificial flowers such as the drudge of a money-changer would have despised, but with which God was satisfied.

The sanctuary lamp was a night-wick placed in an old holy-water basin of plated copper hanging by silken cords, the spoil of some demolished château. The baptismal fonts were of wood; so were the pulpit and a sort of cage provided for the church-wardens, the patricians of the village. An altar to the Virgin presented to public admiration two colored lithographs in small gilt frames. The altar was painted white, adorned with artificial flowers in gilded wooden vases, and covered by a cloth edged with shabby and discolored lace.

At the farther end of the church a long window entirely covered by a red calico curtain produced a magi-

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cal effect. This crimson mantle cast a rosy tint upon the whitewashed walls; a thought divine seemed to glow upon the altar and clasp the poor nave as if to warm it. The passage which led to the sacristy exhibited on one of its walls the patron saint of the village, a large Saint John the Baptist with his sheep, carved in wood and horribly painted.

But in spite of all this poverty the church was not without some tender harmonies delightful to choice souls, and set in charming relief by their own colors. The rich dark tones of the wood relieved the white of the walls and blended with the triumphal crimson cast on the chancel. This trinity of color was a reminder of the grand Catholic doctrine.

If surprise was the first emotion roused by this pitiful house of the Lord, surprise was followed speedily by admiration mingled with pity. Did it not truly express the poverty of that poor region? Was it not in harmony with the naïve simplicity of the parsonage? The building was perfectly clean and well-kept. The fragrance of country virtues exhaled within it; nothing showed neglect or abandonment. Though rustic and poor and simple, prayer dwelt there; those precincts had a soul, — a soul which was felt, though we might not fully explain to our own souls how we felt it.

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## VIII.

### THE RECTOR OF MONTÉGNAC.

THE Abbé Gabriel glided softly through the church so as not to disturb the devotions of two groups of persons on the benches near the high altar, which was separated from the nave at the place where the lamp was hung by a rather common balustrade, also of chestnut wood, and covered with a cloth intended for the communion. On either side of the nave a score of peasants, men and women, absorbed in fervent prayer, paid no attention to the stranger when he passed up the narrow passage between the two rows of seats.

When the young abbé stood beneath the lamp, whence he could see the two little transepts which formed a cross, one of which led to the sacristy, the other to the cemetery, he noticed on the cemetery side a family clothed in black kneeling on the pavement, the transepts having no benches. The young priest knelt down on the step of the balustrade which separated the choir from the nave and began to pray, casting oblique glances at a scene which was soon explained to him. The gospel had been read. The rector, having removed his chasuble, came down from the altar and stood before the railing; the young abbé, who foresaw this movement, leaned back against the wall, so that

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Monsieur Bonnet did not see him. Ten o'clock was striking.

"Brethren," said the rector, in a voice of emotion, "at this very moment a child of this parish is paying his debt to human justice by enduring its last penalty, while we are offering the sacrifice of the mass for the peace of his soul. Let us unite in prayer to God, imploring Him not to turn His face from that child in these his last moments, and to grant to his repentance the pardon in heaven which is denied to him here below. The sin of this unhappy man, one of those on whom we most relied for good examples, can only be explained by his disregard of religious principles."

Here the rector was interrupted by sobs from the kneeling group in mourning garments, whom the Abbé Gabriel recognized, by this show of affection, as the Tascheron family, although he did not know them. First among them was an old couple (septuagenarians) standing by the wall, their faces seamed with deep-cut, rigid wrinkles, and bronzed like a Florentine medal. These persons, stoically erect like statues, in their old darned clothes, were doubtless the grandfather and the grandmother of the criminal. Their glazed and reddened eyes seemed to weep blood, their arms trembled so that the sticks on which they leaned tapped lightly on the pavement. Next, the father and the mother, their faces in their handkerchiefs, sobbed aloud. Around these four heads of the family knelt the two married sisters accompanied by their husbands, and three sons, stupefied with grief. Five little children on their knees, the oldest not seven years old, unable, no doubt, to understand what was happening, gazed and listened

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with the torpid curiosity that characterizes the peasantry, and is really the observation of physical things pushed to its highest limit. Lastly, the poor unmarried sister, imprisoned in the interests of justice, now released, a martyr to fraternal affection, Denise Tascheron, was listening to the priest's words with a look that was partly bewildered and partly incredulous. For her, her brother could not die. She well represented that one of the Three Marys who did not believe in the death of Christ, though she was present at the last agony. Pale, with dry eyes, like all those who have gone without sleep, her fresh complexion was already faded, less by toil and field labor than by grief; nevertheless, she had many of the beauties of a country maiden, — a full, plump figure, finely shaped arms, rounded cheeks, and clear, pure eyes, lighted at this instant with flashes of despair. Below the throat, a firm, fair skin, not tanned by the sun, betrayed the presence of a white and rosy flesh where the form was hidden.

The married daughters wept; their husbands, patient farmers, were grave and serious. The three brothers, profoundly sad, did not raise their eyes from the ground. In the midst of this dreadful picture of dumb despair and desolation, Denise and her mother alone showed symptoms of revolt.

The other inhabitants of the village united in the affliction of this respectable family with a sincere and Christian pity which gave the same expression to the faces of all, — an expression amounting to horror when the rector's words announced that the knife was then falling on the neck of a young man whom they all knew

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well from his very birth, and whom they had doubtless thought incapable of crime.

The sobs which interrupted the short and simple allocution which the pastor made to his flock overcame him so much that he stopped and said no more, except to invite all present to fervent prayer.

Though this scene was not of a nature to surprise a priest, Gabriel de Rastignac was too young not to be profoundly touched by it. As yet he had never exercised the priestly virtues; he knew himself called to other functions; he was not forced to enter the social breaches where the heart bleeds at the sight of woes: his mission was that of the higher clergy, who maintain the spirit of devotion, represent the highest intellect of the Church, and on eminent occasions display the priestly virtues on a larger stage, — like the illustrious bishops of Marseille and Meaux, and the archbishops of Arles and Cambrai.

This little assemblage of country people weeping and praying for him who, as they supposed, was then being executed on a public square, among a crowd of persons come from all parts to swell the shame of such a death, — this feeble counterpoise of prayer and pity, opposed to the ferocious curiosity and just maledictions of a multitude, was enough to move any soul, especially when seen in that poor church. The Abbé Gabriel was tempted to go up to the Tascherons and say, —

"Your son and brother is reprieved."

But he did not like to disturb the mass; and, moreover, he knew that a reprieve was only a delay of execution. Instead of following the service, he was irresistibly drawn to a study of the pastor from whom

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the clergy in Limoges expected the conversion of the criminal.

Judging by the parsonage, Gabriel de Rastignac had made himself a portrait of Monsieur Bonnet as a stout, short man with a strong and red face, framed for toil, half a peasant, and tanned by the sun. So far from that, the young abbé met his equal. Slight and delicate in appearance, Monsieur Bonnet's face struck the eye at once as the typical face of passion given to the Apostles. It was almost triangular, beginning with a broad brow furrowed by wrinkles, and carried down from the temples to the chin in two sharp lines which defined his hollow cheeks. In this face, sallowed by tones as yellow as those of a church taper, shone two blue eyes that were luminous with faith, burning with eager hope. It was divided in two equal parts by a long nose, thin and straight, with well-cut nostrils, beneath which spoke, even when closed and voiceless, a large mouth, with strongly marked lips, from which issued, whenever he spoke aloud, one of those voices which go straight to the heart. The chestnut hair, which was thin and fine, and lay flat upon the head, showed a poor constitution maintained by a frugal diet. WILL made the power of this man.

Such were his personal distinctions. His short hands might have indicated in another man a tendency to coarse pleasures, and perhaps he had, like Socrates, conquered his temptations. His thinness was ungraceful, his shoulders were too prominent, his knees knocked together. The body, too much developed for the extremities, gave him the look of a hump-backed man without a hump. In short, his appearance was

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not pleasing. None but those to whom the miracles of thought, faith, art are known could adore that flaming gaze of the martyr, that pallor of constancy, that voice of love, — distinctive characteristics of this village rector.

This man, worthy of the primitive Church, which exists no longer except in the pictures of the sixteenth century and in the pages of Martyrology, was stamped with the die of the human greatness which most nearly approaches the divine greatness through Conviction, — that indefinable something which embellishes the commonest form, gilds with glowing tints the faces of men vowed to any worship, no matter what, and brings into the face of a woman glorified by a noble love a sort of light. CONVICTION is human will attaining to its highest reach. At once both cause and effect, it impresses the coldest natures; it is a species of mute eloquence which holds the masses.

Coming down from the altar the rector caught the eye of the Abbé Gabriel and recognized him; so that when the bishop's secretary reached the sacristy Ursule, to whom her master had already given orders, was waiting for him with a request that he would follow her.

"Monsieur," said Ursule, a woman of canonical age, conducting the Abbé de Rastignac by the gallery through the garden, "Monsieur Bonnet told me to ask if you had breakfasted. You must have left Limoges very early to get here by ten o'clock. I will soon have breakfast ready for you. Monsieur l'abbé will not find a table like that of Monseigneur the bishop in this poor village, but we will do the best we can. Monsieur

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Bonnet will soon be in; he has gone to comfort those poor people, the Taschérons. Their son has met with a terrible end to-day."

"But," said the Abbé Gabriel, when he could get in a word, "where is the house of those worthy persons? I must take Monsieur Bonnet at once to Limoges by order of the bishop. That unfortunate man will not be executed to-day; Monseigneur has obtained a reprieve for him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ursule, whose tongue itched to spread the news about the village, "monsieur has plenty of time to carry them that comfort while I get breakfast ready. The Taschérons' house is beyond the village; follow the path below that terrace and it will take you there."

As soon as Ursule lost sight of the abbé she went down into the village to disseminate the news, and also to buy the things needed for the breakfast.

The rector had been informed, while in church, of a desperate resolution taken by the Taschérons as soon as they heard that Jean-François's appeal was rejected and that he had to die. These worthy souls intended to leave the country, and their worldly goods were to be sold that very morning. Delays and formalities unexpected by them had hitherto postponed the sale. They had been forced to remain in their home until the execution, and drink each day the cup of shame. This determination had not been made public until the evening before the day appointed for the execution. The Taschérons had expected to leave before that fatal day; but the proposed purchaser of their property was a stranger in those parts, and was prevented

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from clinching the bargain by a delay in obtaining the money. Thus the hapless family were forced to bear their trouble to its end. The feeling which prompted this expatriation was so violent in these simple souls, little accustomed to compromise with their consciences, that the grandfather and grandmother, the father and the mother, the daughters and their husbands and the sons, in short, all who bore and had borne the name of Tascheron or were closely allied to it made ready to leave the country.

This emigration grieved the whole community. The mayor entreated the rector to do his best to retain these worthy people. According to the new Code the father was not responsible for the son, and the crime of the father was no disgrace to the children. Together with other emancipations which have weakened paternal power, this system has led to the triumph of individualism, which is now permeating the whole of modern society. He who thinks on the things of the future sees the spirit of family destroyed, where the makers of the new Code have introduced freedom of will and equality. The Family must always be the basis of society. Necessarily temporary, incessantly divided, recomposed to dissolve again, without ties between the future and the past, it cannot fulfil that mission; the Family of the olden time no longer exists in France. Those who have proceeded to demolish the ancient edifice have been logical in dividing equally the family property, in diminishing the authority of the father, in suppressing great responsibilities; but is the reconstructed social state as solid, with its young laws still untried, as it was under a monarchy, in spite

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of the old abuses? In losing the solidarity of families, society has lost that fundamental force which Montesquieu discovered and named HONOR. It has isolated interests in order to subjugate them; it has sundered all to enfeeble all. Society reigns over units, over single figures agglomerated like grains of corn in a heap. Can the general interests of all take the place of Family? Time alone can answer that question.

Nevertheless, the old law still exists; its roots have struck so deep that you will find it still living, as we find perennials in polar regions. Remote places are still to be found in the provinces where what are now called prejudices exist, where the family suffers in the crime of a child or a father.

This sentiment made the place uninhabitable any longer to the Tascherons. Their deep religious feeling took them to church that morning; for how could they let the mass be offered to God asking him to inspire their son with repentance that alone could restore to him life eternal, and not share in it? Besides, they wished to bid farewell to the village altar. But their minds were made up and their plans already carried out. When the rector who followed them from church reached the principal house he found their bags and bundles ready for the journey. The purchaser of the property was there with the money. The notary had drawn up the papers. In the yard behind the house was a carriole ready harnessed to carry away the older couple with the money, and the mother of Jean-François. The remainder of the family were to go on foot by night.

At the moment when the young abbé entered the

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low room in which the family were assembled the rector of Montégnac had exhausted all the resources of his eloquence. The old pair, now insensible to the violence of grief, were crouching in a corner on their bags and looking round them on their old hereditary home, its furniture, and the new purchaser, and then upon each other as if to say: —

"Did we ever think this thing could happen?"

These old people, who had long resigned their authority to their son, the father of the criminal, were, like kings on their abdication, reduced to the passive rôle of subjects and children. Tascheron, the father, was standing up; he listened to the pastor, and replied to him in a low voice and by monosyllables. This man, who was about forty-eight years of age, had the noble face which Titian has given to so many of his Apostles, — a countenance full of faith, of grave and reflective integrity, a stern profile, a nose cut in a straight and projecting line, blue eyes, a noble brow, regular features, black, crisp, wiry hair, planted on his head with that symmetry which gives a charm to these brown faces, bronzed by toil in the open air. It was easy to see that the rector's appeals were powerless against that inflexible will.

Denise was leaning against the bread-box, looking at the notary, who was using that receptacle as a writing-table, seated before it in the grandmother's armchair. The purchaser was sitting on a stool beside him. The married sisters were laying a cloth upon the table, and serving the last meal the family were to take in its own house before expatriating itself to other lands and other skies. The sons were half-seated on the green serge

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bed. The mother, busy beside the fire, was beating an omelet. The grandchildren crowded the doorway, before which stood the incoming family of the purchaser.

The old smoky room with its blackened rafters, through the window of which was visible a well-kept garden planted by the two old people, seemed in harmony with the pent-up anguish which could be read on all their faces in diverse expressions. The meal was chiefly prepared for the notary, the purchaser, the menkind, and the children. The father and mother, Denise and her sisters, were too unhappy to eat. There was a lofty, stern resignation in the accomplishment of these last duties of rustic hospitality. The Tascherons, men of the olden time, ended their days in that house as they had begun them, by doing its honors. This scene, without pretension, though full of solemnity, met the eyes of the bishop's secretary when he approached the village rector to fulfil the prelate's errand.

"The son of these good people still lives," said Gabriel.

At these words, heard by all in the deep silence, the two old people rose to their feet as if the last trump had sounded. The mother dropped her pan upon the fire; Denise gave a cry of joy; all the others stood by in petrified astonishment.

"Jean-François is pardoned!" cried the whole village, now rushing toward the house, having heard the news from Ursule. "Monseigneur the bishop —"

"I knew he was innocent!" cried the mother.

"Will it hinder the purchase?" said the purchaser to the notary, who answered with a satisfying gesture.



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The Abbé Gabriel was now the centre of all eyes; his sadness raised a suspicion of mistake. To avoid correcting it himself, he left the house, followed by the rector, and said to the crowd outside that the execution was only postponed for some days. The uproar subsided instantly into dreadful silence. When the Abbé Gabriel and the rector returned, the expression on the faces of the family was full of anguish; the silence of the crowd was understood.

"My friends, Jean-François is not pardoned," said the young abbé, seeing that the blow had fallen; "but the state of his soul has so distressed Monseigneur that he has obtained a delay in order to save your son in eternity."

"But he lives!" cried Denise.

The young abbé took the rector aside to explain to him the injurious situation in which the impenitence of his parishioner placed religion, and the duty the bishop imposed upon him.

"Monseigneur exacts my death," replied the rector. "I have already refused the entreaties of the family to visit their unhappy son. Such a conference and the sight of his death would shatter me like glass. Every man must work as he can. The weakness of my organs, or rather, the too great excitability of my nervous organization, prevents me from exercising these functions of our ministry. I have remained a simple rector expressly to be useful to my kind in a sphere in which I can really accomplish my Christian duty. I have carefully considered how far I could satisfy this virtuous family and do my pastoral duty to this poor son; but the very idea of mounting the scaffold with him, the

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mere thought of assisting in those fatal preparations, sends a shudder as of death through my veins. It would not be asked of a mother; and remember, monsieur, he was born in the bosom of my poor church."

"So," said the Abbé Gabriel, "you refuse to obey Monseigneur?"

"Monseigneur is ignorant of the state of my health; he does not know that in a constitution like mine nature refuses —" said Monsieur Bonnet, looking at the younger priest.

"There are times when we ought, like Belzunce at Marseille, to risk certain death," replied the Abbé Gabriel, interrupting him.

At this moment the rector felt a hand pulling at his cassock; he heard sobs, and turning round he saw the whole family kneeling before him. Young and old, small and great, all were stretching their supplicating hands to him. One sole cry rose from their lips as he turned his face upon them: —

"Save his soul, at least!"

The old grandmother it was who had pulled his cassock and was wetting it with her tears.

"I shall obey, monsieur."

That said, the rector was forced to sit down, for his legs trembled under him. The young secretary explained the frenzied state of the criminal's mind.

"Do you think," he said, as he ended his account, "that the sight of his young sister would shake his determination?"

"Yes, I do," replied the rector. "Denise, you must go with us."

"And I, too," said the mother.

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"No!" cried the father; "that child no longer exists for us, and you know it. None of us shall see him."

"Do not oppose what may be for his salvation," said the young abbé. "You will be responsible for his soul if you refuse us the means of softening it. His death may possibly do more injury than his life has done."

"She may go," said the father; "it shall be her punishment for opposing all the discipline I ever wished to give her son."

The Abbé Gabriel and Monsieur Bonnet returned to the parsonage, where Denise and her mother were requested to come in time to start for Limoges with the two ecclesiastics.

As the younger man walked along the path which followed the outskirts of upper Montégnac he was able to examine the village priest so warmly commended by the vicar-general less superficially than he did in church. He felt at once inclined in his favor, by the simple manners, the voice full of magic power, and the words in harmony with the voice of the village rector. The latter had only visited the bishop's palace once since the prelate had taken Gabriel de Rastignac as secretary. He had hardly seen this favorite, destined for the episcopate, though he knew how great his influence was. Nevertheless, he behaved with a dignified courtesy that plainly showed the sovereign independence which the Church bestows on rectors in their parishes. But the feelings of the young abbé, far from animating his face, gave it a stern expression; it was more than cold, it was icy. A man capable of changing the moral condi-

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tion of a whole population must surely possess some powers of observation, and be more or less of a physiognomist; and even if the rector had no other science than that of goodness, he had just given proof of rare sensibility. He was therefore struck by the coldness with which the bishop's secretary met his courteous advances. Compelled to attribute this manner to some secret annoyance, the rector sought in his own mind to discover if he had wounded his guest, or in what way his conduct could seem blameworthy in the eyes of his superiors.

An awkward silence ensued, which the Abbé de Rastignac broke by a speech that was full of aristocratic assumption.

"You have a very poor church, monsieur," he said.

"It is too small," replied Monsieur Bonnet. "On the great fête-days the old men bring benches to the porch, and the young men stand outside in a circle; but the silence is so great that all can hear my voice."

Gabriel was silent for some moments.

"If the inhabitants are so religious how can you let the building remain in such a state of nudity?" he said at last.

"Alas, monsieur, I have not the courage to spend the money which is needed for the poor on decorating the church, — the poor are the church. I assure you I should not be ashamed of my church if Monseigneur would visit it on the Fête-Dieu. The poor return on that day what they have received. Did you notice the nails which are placed at certain distances in the walls? They are used to hold a sort of trellis of iron wire on which the women fasten bouquets; the church is fairly

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clothed with flowers, and they keep fresh all day. My poor church, which you think so bare, is decked like a bride; it is filled with fragrance; even the floor is strewn with leaves, in the midst of which they make a path of scattered roses for the passage of the holy sacrament. That 's a day on which I do not fear comparison with the pomps of Saint-Peter at Rome; the Holy Father has his gold, and I my flowers, — to each his own miracle. Ah! monsieur, the village of Montégnac is poor, but it is Catholic. In former times the inhabitants robbed travellers; now travellers may leave a sack full of money where they please and they will find it in my house."

"That result is to your glory," said Gabriel.

"It is not a question of myself," replied the rector, coloring at this labored compliment, "but of God's word, of the blessed bread —"

"Brown bread," remarked the abbé, smiling.

"White bread only suits the stomachs of the rich," replied the rector, modestly.

The young abbé here took the hands of the older priest and pressed them cordially.

"Forgive me, monsieur," he said, suddenly making amends with a look in his beautiful blue eyes which went to the depths of the rector's soul. "Monseigneur told me to test your patience and your modesty, but I can't go any further; I see already how much injustice the praises of the liberals have done you."

Breakfast was ready; fresh eggs, butter, honey, fruits, cream, and coffee were served by Ursule in the midst of flowers, on a white cloth laid upon the antique table in that old dining-room. The window which

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looked upon the terrace was open; clematis, with its white stars relieved in the centre by the yellow bunch of their crisped stamens, clasped the railing. A jasmine ran up one side, nasturtiums clambered over the other. Above, the reddening foliage of a vine made a rich border that no sculptor could have rendered, so exquisite was the tracery of its lace-work against the light.

"Life is here reduced, you see, to its simplest expression," said the rector, smiling, though his face did not lose the look which the sadness of his heart conveyed to it. "If we had known of your arrival (but who could have foreseen your errand?) Ursule would have had some mountain trout for you; there 's a brook in the forest where they are excellent. I forget, however, that this is August and the Gabou is now dry. My head is confused with all these troubles."

"Then you like your life here?" said the young abbé.

"Yes, monsieur; if God wills, I shall die rector of Montégnac. I could have wished that my example were followed by certain distinguished men who have thought they did better things in becoming philanthropists. But modern philanthropy is an evil to society; the principles of the Catholic religion can alone cure the diseases which permeate social bodies. Instead of describing those diseases and extending their ravages by complaining elegies, they should put their hand to the work and enter the Lord's vineyard as simple laborers. My task is far from being accomplished here, monsieur. It is not enough to reform the people, whom I found in a frightful condition of impiety and wicked-

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ness; I wish to die in the midst of a generation of true believers."

"You have only done your duty, monsieur," said the young man, still coldly, for his heart was stirred with envy.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the rector, modestly, giving his companion a glance which seemed to say: Is this a further test? "I pray that all may do their duty throughout the kingdom."

This remark, full of deep meaning, was still further emphasized by a tone of utterance, which proved that in 1829 this priest, as grand in thought as he was noble in humility of conduct, and who subordinated his thoughts to those of his superiors, saw clearly into the destinies of both church and monarchy.

When the two afflicted women came the young abbé, very impatient to get back to Limoges, left the parsonage to see if the horses were harnessed. A few moments later he returned to say that all was ready. All four then started under the eyes of the whole population of Montégnac, which was gathered in the roadway before the post-house. The mother and sister kept silence. The two priests, seeing rocks ahead in many subjects, could neither talk indifferently nor allow themselves to be cheerful. While seeking for some neutral subject the carriage crossed the plain, the aspect of which dreary region seemed to influence the duration of their melancholy silence.

"How came you to adopt the ecclesiastical profession?" asked the Abbé Gabriel, suddenly, with an impulsive curiosity which seized him as soon as the carriage turned into the high-road.

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"I did not look upon the priesthood as a profession," replied the rector, simply. "I cannot understand how a man can become a priest for any other reason than the undefinable power of vocation. I know that many men have served in the Lord's vineyard who have previously worn out their hearts in the service of passion; some have loved hopelessly, others have had their love betrayed; men have lost the flower of their lives in burying a precious wife or an adored mistress; some have been disgusted with social life at a period when uncertainty hovers over everything, even over feelings, and doubt mocks tender certainties by calling them beliefs; others abandon politics at a period when power seems to be an expiation and when the governed regard obedience as fatality. Many leave a society without banners; where opposing forces only unite to overthrow good. I do not think that any man would give himself to God from a covetous motive. Some men have looked upon the priesthood as a means of regenerating our country; but, according to my poor lights, a priest-patriot is a meaningless thing. The priest can only belong to God. I did not wish to offer our Father — who nevertheless accepts all — the wreck of my heart and the fragments of my will; I gave myself to him whole. In one of those touching theories of pagan religion, the victim sacrificed to the false gods goes to the altar decked with flowers. The significance of that custom has always deeply touched me. A sacrifice is nothing without grace. My life is simple and without the very slightest romance. My father, who has made his own way in the world, is a stern, inflexible man; he treats his wife and his children as he treats himself.

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I have never seen a smile upon his lips. His iron hand, his stern face, his gloomy, rough activity, oppressed us all — wife, children, clerks and servants — under an almost savage despotism. I could — I speak for myself only — I could have accommodated myself to this life if the power thus exercised had had an equal repression; but, captious and vacillating, he treated us all with intolerable alternations. We were always ignorant whether we were doing right or whether he considered us to blame; and the horrible expectancy which results from that is torture in domestic life. A street life seems better than a home under such circumstances. Had I been alone in the house I would have borne all from my father without murmuring; but my heart was torn by the bitter, unceasing anguish of my dear mother, whom I ardently loved and whose tears put me sometimes into a fury in which I nearly lost my reason. My school days, when boys are usually so full of misery and hard work, were to me a golden period. I dreaded holidays. My mother herself preferred to come and see me. When I had finished my philosophical course and was forced to return home and become my father's clerk, I could not endure it more than a few months; my mind, bewildered by the fever of adolescence, threatened to give way. On a sad autumn evening as I was walking alone with my mother along the Boulevard Bourdon, then one of the most melancholy parts of Paris, I poured my heart into hers, and I told her that I saw no possible life before me except in the Church. My tastes, my ideas, all that I most loved would be continually thwarted so long as my father lived. Under the cassock of a priest he

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would be forced to respect me, and I might thus on certain occasions become the protector of my family. My mother wept much. Just at this period my eldest brother (since a general and killed at Leipzig) had entered the army as a private soldier, driven from his home for the same reasons that made me wish to be a priest. I showed my mother that her best means of protection would be to marry my sister, as soon as she was old enough, to some man of strong character, and to look for help to this new family. Under pretence of avoiding the conscription without costing my father a penny to buy me off, I entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice at the age of nineteen. Within those celebrated old buildings I found a peace and happiness that were troubled only by the thought of my mother and my sister's sufferings. Their domestic misery, no doubt, went on increasing; for whenever they saw me they sought to strengthen my resolution. Perhaps I had been initiated into the secrets of charity, such as our great Saint Paul defines it, by my own trials. At any rate, I longed to stanch the wounds of the poor in some forgotten corner of the earth, and to prove by my example, if God would deign to bless my efforts, that the Catholic religion, judged by its actions for humanity, is the only true, the only beneficent and noble civilizing force. During the last days of my diaconate, grace, no doubt, enlightened me. I have fully forgiven my father, regarding him as the instrument of my destiny. My mother, though I wrote her a long and tender letter, explaining all things and proving to her that the finger of God was guiding me, my poor mother wept many tears as she saw my hair

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cut off by the scissors of the Church. She knew herself how many pleasures I renounced, but she did not know the secret glories to which I aspired. Women are so tender! After I once belonged to God I felt a boundless peace; I felt no needs, no vanities, none of those cares which trouble men so much. I knew that Providence would take care of me as a thing of its own. I entered a world from which all fear is banished; where the future is certain; where all things are divine, even the silence. This quietude is one of the benefactions of grace. My mother could not conceive that a man could espouse a church. Nevertheless, seeing me happy, with a cloudless brow, she grew happier herself. After I was ordained I came to the Limousin to visit one of my paternal relations, who chanced to speak to me of the then condition of Montégnac. A thought darted into my mind with the vividness of lightning, and I said to myself inwardly: 'Here is thy vineyard!' I came here, and you see, monsieur, that my history is very simple and uneventful."

At this instant Limoges came in sight, bathed in the last rays of the setting sun. When the women saw it they could not restrain their tears; they wept aloud.

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## IX.

### DENISE.

THE young man whom these two different loves were now on their way to comfort, who excited so much artless curiosity, so much spurious sympathy and true solicitude, was lying on his prison pallet in one of the condemned cells. A spy watched beside the door to catch, if possible, any words that might escape him, either in sleep or in one of his violent furies; so anxious were the officers of justice to exhaust all human means of discovering Jean-François Tascheron's accomplice and recover the sums stolen.

The des Vanneaulx had promised a reward to the police, and the police kept constant watch on the obstinate silence of the prisoner. When the man on duty looked through a loophole made for the purpose he saw the convict always in the same position, bound in the straight-jacket, his head secured by a leather thong ever since he had attempted to tear the stuff of the jacket with his teeth.

Jean-François gazed steadily at the ceiling with a fixed and despairing eye, a burning eye, as if reddened by the terrible thoughts behind it. He was a living image of the antique Prometheus; the memory of some lost happiness gnawed at his heart. When the solici-

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tor-general himself went to see him that magistrate could not help testifying his surprise at a character so obstinately persistent. No sooner did any one enter his cell than Jean-François flew into a frenzy which exceeded the limits known to physicians for such attacks. The moment he heard the key turn in the lock or the bolts of the barred door slide, a light foam whitened his lips.

Jean-François Tascheron, then twenty-five years of age, was small but well-made. His wiry, crinkled hair, growing low on his forehead, indicated energy. His eyes, of a clear and luminous yellow, were too near the root of the nose, — a defect which gave him some resemblance to birds of prey. The face was round, of the warm brown coloring which marks the inhabitants of middle France. One feature of his physiognomy confirmed an assertion of Lavater as to persons who are destined to commit murder; his front teeth lapped each other. Nevertheless his face bore all the characteristics of integrity and a sweet and artless moral nature; there was nothing surprising in the fact that a woman had loved him passionately. His fresh mouth with its dazzling teeth was charming, but the vermilion of the lips was of the red-lead tint which indicates repressed ferocity, and, in many human beings, a free abandonment to pleasure. His demeanor showed none of the low habits of a workman. In the eyes of the women who were present at the trial it seemed evident that one of their sex had softened those muscles used to toil, had ennobled the countenance of the rustic, and given grace to his person. Women can always detect the traces of love

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in a man, just as men can see in a woman whether, as the saying is, love has passed that way.

Toward evening of the day we are now relating Jean François heard the sliding of bolts and the noise of the key in the lock. He turned his head violently and gave vent to the horrible growl with which his frenzies began; but he trembled all over when the beloved heads of his sister and his mother stood out against the fading light, and behind them the face of the rector of Montégnac.

"The wretches! is this why they keep me alive?" he said, closing his eyes.

Denise, who had lately been confined in a prison, was distrustful of everything; the spy had no doubt hidden himself merely to return in a few moments. The girl flung herself on her brother, bent her tearful face to his and whispered: —

"They may be listening to us."

"Otherwise they would not have let you come here," he replied in a loud voice. "I have long asked the favor that none of my family should be admitted here."

"Oh! how they have bound him!" cried the mother. "My poor child! my poor boy!" and she fell on her knees beside the pallet, hiding her head in the cassock of the priest, who was standing by her.

"If Jean will promise me to be quiet," said the rector, "and not attempt to injure himself, and to behave properly while we are with him, I will ask to have him unbound; but the least violation of his promise will reflect on me."

"I do so want to move as I please, dear Monsieur Bonnet," said the criminal, his eyes moistening with tears, "that I give you my word to do as you wish."

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The rector went out, and returned with the jailer, and the jacket was taken off.

"You won't kill me to-night, will you?" said the turnkey.

Jean made no answer.

"Poor brother!" said Denise, opening a basket which had just passed through a vigorous examination. "Here are some of the things you like; I dare say they don't feed you for the love of God."

She showed him some fruit, gathered as soon as the rector had told her she could go to the jail, and a *galette* his mother had immediately baked for him. This attention, which reminded him of his boyhood, the voice and gestures of his sister, the presence of his mother and the rector, brought on a reaction and he burst into tears.

"Ah! Denise," he said, "I have not had a good meal for six months. I eat only when driven to it by hunger."

The mother and sister went out and then returned; with the natural housekeeping spirit of such women, who want to give their men material comfort, they soon had a supper for their poor child. In this the officials helped them; for an order had been given to do all that could with safety be done for the condemned man. The des Vanneaulx had contributed, with melancholy hope, toward the comfort of the man from whom they still expected to recover their inheritance. Thus poor Jean-François had a last glimpse of family joys, if joys they could be called under such circumstances.

"Is my appeal rejected?" he said to Monsieur Bonnet.

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"Yes, my child; nothing is left for you to do but to make a Christian end. This life is nothing in comparison to that which awaits you; you must think now of your eternal happiness. You can pay your debt to man with your life, but God is not content with such a little thing as that."

"Give up my life! Ah! you do not know all that I am leaving!"

Denise looked at her brother as if to warn him that even in matters of religion he must be cautious.

"Let us say no more about it," he resumed, eating the fruit with an avidity which told of his inward fire. "When am I —"

"No, no! say nothing of that before me!" said the mother.

"But I should be easier in mind if I knew," he said, in a low voice to the rector.

"Always the same nature," exclaimed Monsieur Bonnet. Then he bent down to the prisoner's ear and whispered, "If you will reconcile yourself this night with God so that your repentance will enable me to absolve you, it will be to-morrow. We have already gained much in calming you," he said, aloud.

Hearing these last words, Jean's lips turned pale, his eyes rolled up in a violent spasm, and an angry shudder passed through his frame.

"Am I calm?" he asked himself. Happily his eyes encountered the tearful face of Denise, and he recovered his self-control. "So be it," he said to the rector; "there is no one but you to whom I would listen; they have known how to conquer me."

And he flung himself on his mother's breast.



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"My son," said the mother, weeping, "listen to Monsieur Bonnet; he risks his life, the dear rector, in going with you to —" she hesitated, and then said, "to the gate of eternal life."

Then she kissed Jean's head and held it to her breast for some moments.

"Will he, indeed, go with me?" asked Jean, looking at the rector, who bowed his head in assent. "Well, yes, I will listen to him; I will do all he asks of me."

"You promise it?" said Denise. "The saving of your soul is what we seek. Besides, you would not have all Limoges and the village say that a Tascheron knew not how to die a noble death? And then, too, think that all you lose here you will regain in heaven, where pardoned souls will meet again."

This superhuman effort parched the throat of the heroic girl. She was silent after this, like her mother, but she had triumphed. The criminal, furious at seeing his happiness torn from him by the law, now quivered at the sublime Catholic truth so simply expressed by his sister. All women, even young peasant-women like Denise, know how to touch these delicate chords; for does not every woman seek to make love eternal? Denise had touched two chords, each most sensitive. Awakened pride called on the other virtues chilled by misery and hardened by despair. Jean took his sister's hand and kissed it, and laid it on his heart in a deeply significant manner; he applied it both gently and forcibly.

"Yes," he said, "I must renounce all; this is the last beating of my heart, its last thought. Keep them, Denise."

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And he gave her one of those glances by which a man in crucial moments tries to put his soul into the soul of another human being.

This thought, this word, was, in truth, a last testament, an unspoken legacy, to be as faithfully transmitted as it was trustfully given. It was so fully understood by mother, sister, and priest, that they all with one accord turned their faces from each other, to hide their tears and keep the secret of their thoughts in their own breasts. Those few words were the dying agony of a passion, the farewell of a soul to the glorious things of earth, in accordance with true Catholic renunciation. The rector, comprehending the majesty of all great human things, even criminal things, judged of this mysterious passion by the enormity of the sin. He raised his eyes to heaven as if to invoke the mercy of God. Thence come the consolations, the infinite tendernesses of the Catholic religion, — so humane, so gentle with the hand that descends to man, showing him the law of higher spheres; so awful, so divine, with that other hand held out to lead him into heaven.

Denise had now significantly shown the rector the spot by which to strike that rock and make the waters of repentance flow. But suddenly, as though the memories evoked were dragging him backward, Jean-François gave the harrowing cry of the hyena when the hunters overtake it.

"No, no!" he cried, falling on his knees, "I will live! Mother, give me your clothes; I can escape! Mercy, mercy! Go see the king; tell him —"

He stopped, gave a horrible roar, and clung convulsively to the rector's cassock.

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"Go," said Monsieur Bonnet, in a low voice, to the agitated women.

Jean heard the words; he raised his head, gazed at his mother and sister, then he stooped and kissed their feet.

"Let us say farewell now; do not come back; leave me alone with Monsieur Bonnet. You need not be uneasy about me any longer," he said, pressing his mother and his sister to him with a strength in which he seemed to put all his life.

"How is it we do not die of this?" said Denise to her mother as they passed through the wicket.

It was nearly eight o'clock when this parting took place. At the gate of the prison the two women met the Abbé de Rastignac, who asked them news of the prisoner.

"He will no doubt be reconciled with God," said Denise. "If repentance has not yet begun, he is very near it."

The bishop was soon after informed that the clergy would triumph on this occasion, and that the criminal would go to the scaffold with the most edifying religious sentiments. The prelate, with whom was the attorney-general, expressed a wish to see the rector. Monsieur Bonnet did not reach the palace before midnight. The Abbé Gabriel, who made many trips between the palace and the jail, judged it necessary to fetch the rector in the episcopal coach; for the poor priest was in a state of exhaustion which almost deprived him of the use of his legs. The effect of his day, the prospect of the morrow, the sight of the secret struggle he had witnessed, and the full repentance which had at last over-

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taken his stubborn lamb when the great reckoning of eternity was brought home to him, — all these things had combined to break down Monsieur Bonnet, whose nervous, electrical nature entered into the sufferings of others as though they were his own. Souls that resemble that noble soul espouse so ardently the impressions, miseries, passions, sufferings of those in whom they are interested, that they actually feel them, and in a horrible manner, too; for they are able to measure their extent, — a knowledge which escapes others who are blinded by selfishness of heart or the paroxysm of grief. It is here that a priest like Monsieur Bonnet becomes an artist who feels, rather than an artist who judges.

When the rector entered the bishop's salon and found there the two grand-vicars, the Abbé de Rastignac, Monsieur de Grandville, and the *procureur-général*, he felt convinced that something more was expected of him.

"Monsieur," said the bishop, "have you obtained any facts which you can, without violating your duty, confide to the officers of the law for their guidance?"

"Monseigneur, in order to give absolution to that poor, wandering child, I waited not only till his repentance was as sincere and as complete as the Church could wish, but I have also exacted from him the restitution of the money."

"This restitution," said the *procureur-général*, "brings me here to-night; it will, of course, be made in such a way as to throw light on the mysterious parts of this affair. The criminal certainly had accomplices."

"The interests of human justice," said the rector, "are not those for which I act. I am ignorant of how

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the restitution will be made, but I know it will take place. In sending for me to minister to my parishioner, Monseigneur placed me under the conditions which give to rectors in their parishes the same powers which Monseigneur exercises in his diocese, — barring, of course, all questions of discipline and ecclesiastical obedience."

"That is true," said the bishop. "But the question here is how to obtain from the condemned man voluntary information which may enlighten justice."

"My mission is to win souls to God," said Monsieur Bonnet.

Monsieur de Grancour shrugged his shoulders slightly, but his colleague, the Abbé Dutheil nodded his head in sign of approval.

"Tascheron is no doubt endeavoring to shield some one, whom the restitution will no doubt bring to light," said the *procureur-général.*

"Monsieur," replied the rector, "I know absolutely nothing which would either confute or justify your suspicion. Besides, the secrets of confession are inviolable."

"Will the restitution really take place?" asked the man of law.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the man of God.

"That is enough for me," said the *procureur-général,* who relied on the police to obtain the required information; as if passions and personal interests were not tenfold more astute than the police.

The next day, this being market-day, Jean-François Tascheron was led to execution in a manner to satisfy both the pious and the political spirits of the town.

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Exemplary in behavior, pious and humble, he kissed the crucifix which Monsieur Bonnet held to his lips with a trembling hand. The unhappy man was watched and examined; his glance was particularly spied upon; would his eyes rove in search of some one in the crowd or in a house? His discretion did, as a matter of fact, hold firm to the last. He died as a Christian should, repentant and absolved.

The poor rector was carried away unconscious from the foot of the scaffold, though he did not even see the fatal knife.

During the following night, on the high-road fifteen miles from Limoges, Denise, though nearly exhausted by fatigue and grief, begged her father to let her go again to Limoges and take with her Louis-Marie Tascheron, one of her brothers.

"What more have you to do in that town?" asked her father, frowning.

"Father," she said, "not only must we pay the lawyer who defended him, but we must restore the money which he has hidden."

"You are right," said the honest man, pulling out a leathern pouch he carried with him.

"No, no," said Denise, "he is no longer your son. It is not for those who cursed him, but for those who loved him, to reward the lawyer."

"We will wait for you at Havre," said the father.

Denise and her brother returned to Limoges before daylight. When the police heard, later, of this return they were never able to discover where the brother and sister had hidden themselves.

Denise and Louis went to the upper town cautiously,

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about four o'clock that afternoon, gliding along in the shadow of the houses. The poor girl dared not raise her eyes, fearing to meet the glances of those who had seen her brother's execution. After calling on Monsieur Bonnet, who in spite of his weakness, consented to serve as father and guardian to Denise in the matter, they all went to the lawyer's house in the rue de la Comédie.

"Good-morning, my poor children," said the lawyer, bowing to Monsieur Bonnet; "how can I be of service to you? Perhaps you would like me to claim your brother's body and send it to you?"

"No, monsieur," replied Denise, weeping at an idea which had never yet occurred to her. "I come to pay his debt to you — so far, at least, as money can pay an eternal debt."

"Pray sit down," said the lawyer; noticing that Denise and the rector were still standing.

Denise turned away to take from her corset two notes of five hundred francs each, which were fastened by a pin to her chemise; then she sat down and offered them to her brother's defender. The rector gave the lawyer a flashing look which was instantly moistened by a tear.

"Keep the money for yourself, my poor girl," said the lawyer. "The rich do not pay so generously for a lost cause."

"Monsieur," said Denise, "I cannot obey you."

"Then the money is not yours?" said the lawyer.

"You are mistaken," she replied, looking at Monsieur Bonnet as if to know whether God would be angry at the lie.

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The rector kept his eyes lowered.

"Well, then," said the lawyer, taking one note of five hundred francs and offering the other to the rector, "I will share it with the poor. Now, Denise, change this one, which is really mine," he went on, giving her the note, "for your velvet ribbon and your gold cross. I will hang the cross above my mantel to remind me of the best and purest young girl's heart I have ever known in my whole experience as a lawyer."

"I will give it to you without selling it," cried Denise, taking off her *jeannette* and offering it to him.

"Monsieur," said the rector, "I accept the five hundred francs to pay for the exhumation of the poor lad's body and its transportation to Montégnac. God has no doubt pardoned him, and Jean will rise with my flock on that last day when the righteous and the repentant will be called together to the right hand of the Father."

"So be it," replied the lawyer.

He took Denise by the hand and drew her toward him to kiss her forehead; but the action had another motive.

"My child," he whispered, "no one in Montégnac has five-hundred-franc notes; they are rare even at Limoges, where they are only taken at a discount. This money has been given to you; you will not tell me by whom, and I don't ask you; but listen to me: if you have anything more to do in this town relating to your poor brother, take care! You and Monsieur Bonnet and your brother Louis will be followed by police-spies. Your family is known to have left Montégnac, and as soon as you are seen here you will be watched and surrounded before you are aware of it."

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"Alas!" she said. "I have nothing more to do here."

"She is cautious," thought the lawyer, as he parted from her. "However, she is warned; and I hope she will get safely off."

During this last week in September, when the weather was as warm as in summer, the bishop gave a dinner to the authorities of the place. Among the guests were the *procureur-du-roi* and the attorney-general. Some lively discussions prolonged the party till a late hour. The company played whist and backgammon, a favorite game with the clergy. Toward eleven o'clock the *procureur-du-roi* walked out upon the upper terrace. From the spot where he stood he saw a light on that island to which, on a certain evening, the attention of the bishop and the Abbé Gabriel had been drawn, — Véronique's "Île de France," — and the gleam recalled to the *procureur's* mind the unexplained mysteries of the Tascheron crime. Then, reflecting that there could be no legitimate reason for a fire on that lonely island in the river at that time of night, an idea, which had already struck the bishop and the secretary, darted into his mind with the suddenness and brilliancy of the flame itself which was shining in the distance.

"We have all been fools!" he cried; "but this will give us the accomplices."

He returned to the salon, sought out Monsieur de Grandville, said a few words in his ear, after which they both took leave. But the Abbé de Rastignac accompanied them politely to the door; he watched them as they departed, saw them go to the terrace, noticed the

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fire on the island, and thought to himself, "She is lost!"

The emissaries of the law got there too late. Denise and Louis, whom Jean had taught to dive, were actually on the bank of the river at a spot named to them by Jean, but Louis Tascheron had already dived four times, bringing up each time a bundle containing twenty thousand francs' worth of gold. The first sum was wrapped in a foulard handkerchief knotted by the four corners. This handkerchief, from which the water was instantly wrung, was thrown into a great fire of drift wood already lighted. Denise did not leave the fire till she saw every particle of the handkerchief consumed. The second sum was wrapped in a shawl, the third in a cambric handkerchief; these wrappings were instantly burned like the foulard.

Just as Denise was throwing the wrapping of the fourth and last package into the fire the gendarmes, accompanied by the commissary of police, seized that incriminating article, which Denise let them take without manifesting the least emotion. It was a handkerchief, on which, in spite of its soaking in the river, traces of blood could still be seen. When questioned as to what she was doing there, Denise said she was taking the stolen gold from the river according to her brother Jean's instructions. The commissary asked her why she was burning certain articles; she said she was obeying her brother's last directions. When asked what those articles were she boldly answered, without attempting to deceive: "A foulard, a shawl, a cambric handkerchief, and the handkerchief now captured." The latter had belonged to her brother.

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This discovery and its attendant circumstances made a great stir in Limoges. The shawl, more especially, confirmed the belief that Tascheron had committed the crime in the interests of some love affair.

"He protects that woman after death," said one lady, hearing of these last discoveries, rendered harmless by the criminal's precautions.

"There may be some husband in Limoges who will miss his foulard," said the *procureur-du-roi*, with a laugh, "but he will not dare speak of it."

"These matters of dress are really so compromising," said old Madame Perret, "that I shall make a search through my wardrobe this very evening."

"Whose pretty little footmarks could he have taken such pains to efface while he left his own?" said Monsieur de Grandville.

"Pooh! I dare say she was an ugly woman," said the *procureur-du-roi*.

"She has paid dearly for her sin," observed the Abbé de Grancour.

"Do you know what this affair shows?" cried Monsieur de Grandville. "It shows what women have lost by the Revolution, which has levelled all social ranks. Passions of this kind are no longer met with except in men who still feel an enormous distance between themselves and their mistress."

"You saddle love with many vanities," remarked the Abbé Dutheil.

"What does Madame Graslin think?" asked the prefect.

"What do you expect her to think?" said Monsieur de Grandville. "Her child was born, as she predicted

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to me, on the morning of the execution; she has not seen any one since then, for she is dangerously ill."

A scene took place in another salon in Limoges which was almost comical. The friends of the des Vanneaulx came to congratulate them on the recovery of their property.

"Yes, but they ought to have pardoned that poor man," said Madame des Vanneaulx. "Love, and not greed, made him steal the money; he was neither vicious nor wicked."

"He was full of consideration for us," said Monsieur des Vanneaulx; "and if I knew where his family had gone I would do something for them. They are very worthy people, those Tascherons."

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## X.

### THIRD PHASE OF VÉRONIQUE'S LIFE.

When Madame Graslin recovered from the long illness that followed the birth of her child, which was not till the close of 1829, an illness which forced her to keep her bed and remain in absolute retirement, she heard her husband talking of an important piece of business he was anxious to conclude. The ducal house of Navarreins had offered for sale the forest of Montégnac and the uncultivated lands around it.

Graslin had never yet executed the clause in his marriage contract which obliged him to invest his wife's fortune in lands; up to this time he had preferred to employ the money in his bank, where he had fully doubled it. He now began to speak of this investment. Hearing him discuss it Véronique appeared to remember the name of Montégnac, and asked her husband to fulfil his engagement about her property by purchasing these lands. Monsieur Graslin then proposed to see the rector, Monsieur Bonnet, and inquire of him about the estate, which the Duc de Navarreins was desirous of selling because he foresaw the struggle which the Prince de Polignac was forcing on between liberalism and the house of Bourbon, and he augured ill of it; in fact, the

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duke was one of the boldest opposers of the *coup d'État.*

The duke had sent his agent to Limoges to negotiate the matter; telling him to accept any good sum of money, for he remembered the Revolution of 1789 too well not to profit by the lessons it had taught the aristocracy. This agent had now been a month laying siege to Graslin, the shrewdest and wariest business head in the Limousin, — the only man, he was told by practical persons, who was able to purchase so large a property and pay for it on the spot. The Abbé Dutheil wrote a line to Monsieur Bonnet, who came to Limoges at once, and was taken to the hôtel Graslin.

Véronique determined to ask the rector to dinner; but the banker would not let him go up his wife's apartment until he had talked to him in his office for over an hour and obtained such information as fully satisfied him, and made him resolve to buy the forest and domains of Montégnac at once for the sum of five hundred thousand francs. He acquiesced readily in his wife's wish that this purchase and all others connected with it should be in fulfilment of the clause of the marriage contract relative to the investment of her dowry. Graslin was all the more ready to do so because this act of justice cost him nothing, he having doubled the original sum.

At this time, when Graslin was negotiating the purchase, the Navarreins domains comprised the forest of Montégnac which contained about thirty thousand acres of unused land, the ruins of the castle, the gardens, park, and about five thousand acres of uncultivated land on the plain beyond Montégnac. Graslin

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immediately bought other lands in order to make himself master of the first peak in the chain of the Corrèzan mountains on which the vast forest of Montégnac ended. Since the imposition of taxes the Duc de Navarreins had never received more than fifteen thousand francs per annum from this manor, once among the richest tenures of the kingdom, the lands of which had escaped the sale of "public domain" ordered by the Convention, on account probably of their barrenness and the known difficulty of reclaiming them.

When the rector went at last to Madame Graslin's apartment, and saw the woman noted for her piety and for her intellect of whom he had heard speak, he could not restrain a gesture of amazement. Véronique had now reached the third phase of her life, that in which she was to rise into grandeur by the exercise of the highest virtues, — a phase in which she became another woman. To the Little Virgin of Titian, hidden at eleven years of age beneath a spotted mantle of small-pox, had succeeded a beautiful woman, noble and passionate; and from that woman, now wrung by inward sorrows, came forth a saint.

Her skin bore the yellow tinge which colors the austere faces of abbesses who have been famous for their macerations. The attenuated temples were almost golden. The lips had paled, the red of an opened pomegranate was no longer on them, their color had changed to the pale pink of a Bengal rose. At the corners of the eyes, close to the nose, sorrows had made two shining tracks like mother-of-pearl, where tears had flowed; tears which effaced the marks of small-pox and glazed the skin. Curiosity was invincibly attracted to

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that pearly spot, where the blue threads of the little veins throbbed precipitately, as though they were swelled by an influx of blood brought there, as it were, to feed the tears. The circle round the eyes was now a dark-brown that was almost black above the eyelids, which were horribly wrinkled. The cheeks were hollow; in their folds lay the sign of solemn thoughts. The chin, which in youth was full and round, the flesh covering the muscles, was now shrunken, to the injury of its expression, which told of an implacable religious severity exercised by this woman upon herself.

At twenty-nine years of age Véronique's hair was scanty and already whitening. Her thinness was alarming. In spite of her doctor's advice she insisted on suckling her son. The doctor triumphed in the result; and as he watched the changes he had foretold in Véronique's appearance, he often said: —

"See the effects of childbirth on a woman! She adores that child; I have often noticed that mothers are fondest of the children who cost them most."

Véronique's faded eyes were all that retained even a memory of her youth. The dark blue of the iris still cast its passionate fires, to which the woman's life seemed to have retreated, deserting the cold, impassible face, and glowing with an expression of devotion when the welfare of a fellow-being was concerned.

Thus the surprise, the dread of the rector ceased by degrees as he went on explaining to Madame Graslin all the good that a large owner of property could do at Montégnac provided he lived there. Véronique's beauty came back to her for a moment as her eyes glowed with the light of an unhoped-for future.



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"I will live there," she said. "It shall be my work. I will ask Monsieur Graslin for money, and I will gladly share in your religious enterprise. Montégnac shall be fertilized; we will find some means to water those arid plains. Like Moses, you have struck a rock from which the waters will gush."

The rector of Montégnac, when questioned by his friends in Limoges about Madame Graslin, spoke of her as a saint.

The day after the purchase was concluded Monsieur Graslin sent an architect to Montégnac. The banker intended to restore the château, gardens, terrace, and park, and also to connect the castle grounds with the forest by a plantation. He set himself to make these improvements with vainglorious activity.

A few months later Madame Graslin met with a great misfortune. In August, 1830, Graslin, overtaken by the commercial and banking disasters of that period, became involved by no fault of his own. He could not endure the thought of bankruptcy, nor that of losing a fortune of three millions acquired by forty years of incessant toil. The moral malady which resulted from this anguish of mind aggravated the inflammatory disease always ready to break forth in his blood. He took to his bed. Since her confinement Véronique's regard for her husband had developed, and had overthrown all the hopes of her admirer, Monsieur de Grandville. She strove to save her husband's life by unremitting care, with no result but that of prolonging for a few months the poor man's tortures; but the respite was very useful to Grossetête, who, foreseeing the end of his former clerk and partner, obtained from

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him all the information necessary for the prompt liquidation of the assets.

Graslin died in April, 1831, and the widow's grief yielded only to Christian resignation. Véronique's first words, when the condition of Monsieur Graslin's affairs was made known to her, were that she abandoned her own fortune to pay the creditors; but it was found that Graslin's own property was more than sufficient. Two months later, the liquidation, of which Grossetête took charge, left to Madame Graslin the estate of Montégnac and six hundred thousand francs, her whole personal fortune. The son's name remained untainted, for Graslin had injured no one's property, not even that of his wife. Francis Graslin, the son, received about one hundred thousand francs.

Monsieur de Grandville, to whom Véronique's grandeur of soul and noble qualities were well known, made her an offer of marriage; but, to the surprise of all Limoges, Madame Graslin declined it, under pretext that the Church discouraged second marriages. Grossetête, a man of strong common-sense and sure grasp of a situation, advised Véronique to invest her property and what remained of Monsieur Graslin's in the Funds; and he made the investment himself in one of the government securities which offered special advantages at that time, namely, the Three-per-cents, which were then quoted at fifty. The child Francis received, therefore, six thousand francs a year, and his mother forty thousand. Véronique's fortune was still the largest in the department.

When these affairs were all settled, Madame Graslin announced her intention of leaving Limoges and taking

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up her residence at Montégnac, to be near Monsieur Bonnet. She sent for the rector to consult about the enterprise he was so anxious to carry on at Montégnac, in which she desired to take part. But he endeavored unselfishly to dissuade her, telling her that her place was in the world and in society.

"I was born of the people and I wish to return to the people," she replied. On which the rector, full of love for his village, said no more against Madame Graslin's apparent vocation; and the less because she had actually put it out of her power to continue in Limoges, having sold the hôtel Graslin to Grossetête, who, to cover a sum that was due to him, took it at its proper valuation.

The day of her departure, toward the end of August, 1831, Madame Graslin's numerous friends accompanied her some distance out of the town. A few went as far as the first relay. Véronique was in an open carriage with her mother. The Abbé Dutheil (just appointed to a bishopric) occupied the front seat of the carriage with old Grossetête. As they passed through the place d'Aine, Véronique showed signs of a sudden shock; her face contracted so that the play of the muscles could be seen; she clasped her infant to her breast with a convulsive motion, which old Madame Sauviat concealed by instantly taking the child, for she seemed to be on the watch for her daughter's agitation. Chance willed that Madame Graslin should pass through the square in which stood the house she had formerly occupied with her father and mother in her girlish days; she grasped her mother's hand while great tears fell from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

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After leaving Limoges she turned and looked back, seeming to feel an emotion of happiness which was noticed by all her friends. When Monsieur de Grandville, then a young man of twenty-five, whom she declined to take as a husband, kissed her hand with an earnest expression of regret, the new bishop noticed the strange manner in which the black pupil of Véronique's eyes suddenly spread over the blue of the iris, reducing it to a narrow circle. The eye betrayed unmistakably some violent inward emotion.

"I shall never see him again," she whispered to her mother, who received this confidence without betraying the slightest feeling in her old face.

Madame Graslin was at that instant under the observation of Grossetête, who was directly in front of her; but, in spite of his shrewdness, the old banker did not detect the hatred which Véronique felt for the magistrate, whom she nevertheless received at her house. But churchmen have far more perception than other men, and Monseigneur Dutheil suddenly startled Véronique with a priestly glance.

"Do you regret nothing in Limoges?" he asked her.

"Nothing, now that you are leaving it; and monsieur," she added, smiling at Grossetête, who was bidding her adieu, "will seldom be there."

The bishop accompanied Madame Graslin as far as Montégnac.

"I ought to walk this road in sackcloth and ashes," she said in her mother's ear as they went on foot up the steep slope of Saint-Leonard.

The old woman put her finger on her lips and glanced

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at the bishop, who was looking at the child with terrible attention. This gesture, and the luminous look in the prelate's eyes, sent a shudder through Véronique's body. At the aspect of the vast plains stretching their gray expanse before Montégnac the fire died out of her eyes, and an infinite sadness overcame her. Presently she saw the village rector coming to meet her, and together they returned to the carriage.

"There is your domain, madame," said Monsieur Bonnet, extending his hand toward the barren plain.

A few moments more and the village of Montégnac, with its hill, on which the newly erected buildings struck the eye, came in sight, gilded by the setting sun, and full of the poesy born of the contrast between the beautiful spot and the surrounding barrenness, in which it lay like an oasis in the desert. Madame Graslin's eyes filled suddenly with tears. The rector called her attention to a broad white line like a gash on the mountain side.

"See what my parishioners have done to testify their gratitude to the lady of the manor," he said, pointing to the line, which was really a road; "we can now drive up to the château. This piece of road has been made by them without costing you a penny, and two months hence we shall plant it with trees. Monseigneur will understand what trouble and care and devotion were needed to accomplish such a change."

"Is it possible they have done that?" said the bishop.

"Without accepting any payment for their work, Monseigneur. The poorest put their hands to it, knowing that it would bring a mother among them."

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At the foot of the hill the travellers saw the whole population of the neighborhood, who were lighting fire-boxes and discharging a few guns; then two of the prettiest of the village girls, dressed in white, came forward to offer Madame Graslin flowers and fruit.

"To be thus received in this village!" she exclaimed, grasping the rector's hand as if she stood on the brink of a precipice.

The crowd accompanied the carriage to the iron gates of the avenue. From there Madame Graslin could see her château, of which as yet she had only caught glimpses, and she was thunderstruck at the magnificence of the building. Stone is rare in those parts, the granite of the mountains being difficult to quarry. The architect employed by Graslin to restore the house had used brick as the chief substance of this vast construction. This was rendered less costly by the fact that the forest of Montégnac furnished all the necessary wood and clay for its fabrication. The framework of wood and the stone for the foundations also came from the forest; otherwise the cost of the restorations would have been ruinous. The chief expenses had been those of transportation, labor, and salaries. Thus the money laid out was kept in the village, and greatly benefited it.

At first sight, and from a distance, the château presents an enormous red mass, threaded by black lines produced by the pointing, and edged with gray; for the window and door casings, the entablatures, corner stones, and courses between the stories, are of granite, cut in facets like a diamond. The courtyard, which forms a sloping oval like that of the Château de Ver-

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sailles, is surrounded by brick walls divided into panels by projecting buttresses. At the foot of these walls are groups of rare shrubs, remarkable for the varied color of their greens. Two fine iron gates placed opposite to each other lead on one side to a terrace which overlooks Montégnac, on the other to the offices and a farm-house.

The grand entrance-gate, to which the road just constructed led, is flanked by two pretty lodges in the style of the sixteenth century. The façade on the courtyard looking east has three towers, — one in the centre, separated from the two others by the main building of the house. The façade on the gardens, which is absolutely the same as the other, looks westward. The towers have but one window on the façade; the main building has three on each side of the middle tower. The latter, which is square like a *campanile*, the corners being vermiculated, is noticeable for the elegance of a few carvings sparsely distributed. Art is timid in the provinces, and though, since 1829, ornamentation has made some progress at the instigation of certain writers, landowners were at that period afraid of expenses which the lack of competition and skilled workmen rendered serious.

The corner towers, which have three stories with a single window in each, looking to the side, are covered with very high-pitched roofs surrounded by granite balustrades, and on each pyramidal slope of these roofs crowned at the top with the sharp ridge of a platform surrounded with a wrought iron railing, is another window carved like the rest. On each floor the corbels of the doors and windows are adorned with carvings

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copied from those of the Genoese mansions. The corner tower with three windows to the south looks down on Montégnac; the other, to the north, faces the forest. From the garden front the eye takes in that part of Montégnac which is still called Les Tascherons, and follows the high-road leading through the village to the chief town of the department. The façade on the courtyard has a view of the vast plains semicircled by the mountains of the Corrèze, on the side toward Montégnac, but ending in the far distance on a low horizon. The main building has only one floor above the ground-floor, covered with a mansarde roof in the olden style. The towers at each end are three stories in height. The middle tower has a stunted dome something like that on the Pavillon de l'Horloge of the palace of the Tuileries, and in it is a single room forming a belvedere and containing the clock. As a matter of economy the roofs had all been made of gutter-tiles, the enormous weight of which was easily supported by the stout beams and uprights of the framework cut in the forest.

Before his death Graslin had laid out the road which the peasantry had just built out of gratitude; for these restorations (which Graslin called his folly) had distributed several hundred thousand francs among the people; in consequence of which Montégnac had considerably increased. Graslin had also begun, before his death, behind the offices on the slope of the hill leading down to the plain, a number of farm buildings, proving his intention to draw some profit from the hitherto uncultivated soil of the plains. Six journeyman-gardeners, who were lodged in the offices, were now at

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work under orders of a head gardener, planting and completing certain works which Monsieur Bonnet had considered indispensable.

The ground-floor apartments of the château, intended only for reception-rooms, had been sumptuously furnished; the upper floor was rather bare, Monsieur Graslin having stopped for a time the work of furnishing it.

"Ah, Monseigneur!" said Madame Graslin to the bishop, after going the rounds of the house, "I who expected to live in a cottage! Poor Monsieur Graslin was extravagant indeed!"

"And you," said the bishop, adding after a pause, as he noticed the shudder that ran through her frame at his first words, "you will be extravagant in charity?"

She took the arm of her mother, who was leading Francis by the hand, and went to the long terrace at the foot of which are the church and the parsonage, and from which the houses of the village can be seen in tiers. The rector carried off Monseigneur Dutheil to show him the different sides of the landscape. Before long the two priests came round to the farther end of the terrace, where they found Madame Graslin and her mother motionless as statues. The old woman was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief, and her daughter stood with both hands stretched beyond the balustrade as though she were pointing to the church below.

"What is the matter, madame?" said the rector to Madame Sauviat.

"Nothing," replied Madame Graslin, turning round and advancing a few steps to meet the priests; "I did not know that I should have the cemetery under my eyes."

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"You can put it elsewhere; the law gives you that right."

"The law!" she exclaimed with almost a cry.

Again the bishop looked fixedly at Véronique. Disturbed by the dark glance with which the priest had penetrated the veil of flesh that covered her soul, dragging thence a secret hidden in a grave of that cemetery, she said to him suddenly: —

"Well, *yes!*"

The priest laid his hand over his eyes and was silent for a moment as if stunned.

"Help my daughter," cried the old mother; "she is fainting."

"The air is so keen, it overcomes me," said Madame Graslin, as she fell unconscious into the arms of the two priests, who carried her into one of the lower rooms of the château.

When she recovered consciousness she saw the priests on their knees praying for her.

"May the angel who visited you never leave you!" said the bishop, blessing her. "Farewell, my daughter."

Overcome by those words Madame Graslin burst into tears.

"Tears will save her!" cried her mother.

"In this world and in the next," said the bishop, turning round as he left the room.

The room to which they had carried Madame Graslin was on the first floor above the ground-floor of the corner tower, from which the church and cemetery and southern side of Montégnac could be seen. She determined to remain there, and did so, more or less uncomfortably, with Aline her maid and little Francis.

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Madame Sauviat, naturally, took another room near hers.

It was several days before Madame Graslin recovered from the violent emotion which overcame her on that first evening, and her mother induced her to stay in bed at least during the mornings. At night, Véronique would come out and sit on a bench of the terrace from which her eyes could rest on the church and cemetery. In spite of Madame Sauviat's mute but persistent opposition, Madame Graslin formed an almost monomaniacal habit of sitting in the same place, where she seemed to give way to the blackest melancholy.

"Madame will die," said Aline to the old mother.

Appealed to by Madame Sauviat, the rector, who had wished not to seem intrusive, came henceforth very frequently to visit Madame Graslin; he needed only to be warned that her soul was sick. This true pastor took care to pay his visits at the hour when Véronique came out to sit at the corner of the terrace with her child, both in deep mourning.

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## XI.

### THE RECTOR AT WORK.

It was now the beginning of October, and Nature was growing dull and sad. Monsieur Bonnet, perceiving in Véronique from the moment of her arrival at Montégnac the existence of an inward wound, thought it wisest to wait for the voluntary and complete confidence of a woman who would sooner or later become his penitent.

One evening Madame Graslin looked at the rector with eyes almost glazed with that fatal indecision often observable in persons who are cherishing the thought of death. From that moment Monsieur Bonnet hesitated no longer; he set before him the duty of arresting the progress of this cruel moral malady.

At first there was a brief struggle of empty words between the priest and Véronique, in which they both sought to veil their real thoughts. In spite of the cold, Véronique was sitting on the granite bench holding Francis on her knee. Madame Sauviat was standing at the corner of the terrace, purposely so placed as to hide the cemetery. Aline was waiting to take the child away.

"I had supposed, madame," said the rector, who was now paying his seventh visit, "that you were only

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melancholy; but I see," sinking his voice to a whisper, "that your soul is in despair. That feeling is neither Christian nor catholic."

"But," she replied, looking to heaven with piercing eyes and letting a bitter smile flicker on her lips, "what other feeling does the Church leave to a lost soul unless it be despair?"

As he heard these words the rector realized the vast extent of the ravages in her soul.

"Ah!" he said, "you are making this terrace your hell, when it ought to be your Calvary from which to rise to heaven."

"I have no pride left to place me on such a pedestal," she answered, in a tone which revealed the self-contempt that lay within her.

Here the priest, by one of those inspirations which are both natural and frequent in noble souls, the man of God lifted the child in his arms and kissed its forehead, saying, in a fatherly voice, "Poor little one!" Then he gave it himself to the nurse, who carried it away.

Madame Sauviat looked at her daughter, and saw the efficacy of the rector's words; for Véronique's eyes, long dry, were moist with tears. The old woman made a sign to the priest and disappeared.

"Let us walk," said the rector to Véronique leading her along the terrace to the other end, from which Les Tascherons could be seen. "You belong to me; I must render account to God for your sick soul."

"Give me time to recover from my depression," she said to him.

"Your depression comes from injurious meditation," he replied, quickly.

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"Yes," she said, with the simplicity of a grief which has reached the point of making no attempt at concealment.

"I see plainly that you have fallen into the gulf of apathy," he cried. "If there is a degree of physical suffering at which all sense of modesty expires, there is also a degree of moral suffering in which all vigor of soul is lost; I know that."

She was surprised to hear that subtle observation and to find such tender pity from this village rector; but, as we have seen already, the exquisite delicacy which no passion had ever touched gave him the true maternal spirit for his flock. This *mens divinior*, this apostolic tenderness, places the priest above all other men and makes him, in a sense, divine. Madame Graslin had not as yet had enough experience of Monsieur Bonnet to know this beauty hidden in his soul like a spring, from which flowed grace and purity and true life.

"Ah! monsieur," she cried, giving herself wholly up to him by a gesture, a look, such as the dying give.

"I understand you," he said. "What is to be done? What will you become?"

They walked in silence the whole length of the balustrade, facing toward the plain. The solemn moment seemed propitious to the bearer of good tidings, the gospel messenger, and he took it.

"Suppose yourself now in the presence of God," he said, in a low voice, mysteriously; "what would you say to him?"

Madame Graslin stopped as though struck by a thunderbolt; she shuddered; then she said simply, in tones that brought tears to the rector's eyes:—

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"I should say, as Jesus Christ said: 'Father, why hast thou forsaken me?'"

"Ah! Magdalen, that is the saying I expected of you," cried Monsieur Bonnet, who could not help admiring her. "You see you are forced to appeal to God's justice; you invoke it! Listen to me, madame. Religion is, by anticipation, divine justice. The Church claims for herself the right to judge the actions of the soul. Human justice is a feeble image of divine justice; it is but a pale imitation of it applied to the needs of society."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You are not the judge of your own case, you are dependent upon God," said the priest; "you have neither the right to condemn yourself nor the right to absolve yourself. God, my child, is a great reverser of judgments."

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

"He *sees* the origin of things, where we see only the things themselves."

Véronique stopped again, struck by these ideas, that were new to her.

"To you," said the brave priest, "to you whose soul is a great one, I owe other words than those I ought to give to my humble parishioners. You, whose mind and spirit are so cultivated, you can rise to the sense divine of the Catholic religion, expressed by images and words to the poor and childlike. Listen to me attentively, for what I am about to say concerns you; no matter how extensive is the point of view at which I place myself for a moment, the case is yours. *Law*, invented to protect society, is based on equality. Society, which

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is nothing but an assemblage of acts, is based on inequality. There is therefore lack of harmony between act and law. Ought society to march on favored or repressed by law? In other words, ought law to be in opposition to the interior social movement for the maintenance of society, or should it be based on that movement in order to guide it? All legislators have contented themselves with analyzing acts, indicating those that seemed to them blamable or criminal, and attaching punishments to such or rewards to others. That is human law; it has neither the means to prevent sin, nor the means to prevent the return to sinfulness of those it punishes. Philanthropy is a sublime error; it tortures the body uselessly, it produces no balm to heal the soul. Philanthropy gives birth to projects, emits ideas, confides the execution of them to man, to silence, to labor, to rules, to things mute and powerless. Religion is above these imperfections, for it extends man's life beyond this world. Regarding us all as degraded from our high estate, religion has opened to us an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence. We are all more or less advanced toward our complete regeneration; no one is sinless; the Church expects wrongdoing, even crime. Where society sees a criminal to be expelled from its bosom, the Church sees a soul to save. More, far more than that! Inspired by God, whom she studies and contemplates, the Church admits the inequalities of strength, she allows for the disproportion of burdens. If she finds us unequal in heart, in body, in mind, in aptitude, and value, she makes us all equal by repentance. Hence equality is no longer a vain word, for we can be, we are, all equal through



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feeling. From the formless fetichism of savages to the graceful inventions of Greece, or the profound and metaphysical doctrines of Egypt and India, whether taught in cheerful or in terrifying worship, there is a conviction in the soul of man — that of his fall, that of his sin — from which comes everywhere the idea of sacrifice and redemption. The death of the Redeemer of the human race is an image of what we have to do for ourselves, — redeem our faults, redeem our errors, redeem our crimes! All is redeemable; Catholicism itself is in that word; hence its adorable sacraments, which help the triumph of grace and sustain the sinner. To weep, to moan like Magdalen in the desert, is but the beginning; the end is Action. Monasteries wept and acted; they prayed and civilized; they were the active agents of our divine religion. They built, planted, cultivated Europe; all the while saving the treasures of learning, knowledge, human justice, politics, and art. We shall ever recognize in Europe the places where those radiant centres once were. Nearly all our modern towns are the children of monasteries. If you believe that God will judge you, the Church tells you by my voice that sin can be redeemed by works of repentance. The mighty hand of God weighs both the evil done and the value of benefits accomplished. Be yourself like those monasteries; work here the same miracles. Your prayers must be labors. From your labors must come the good of those above whom you are placed by fortune, by superiority of mind; even this natural position of your dwelling is the image of your social situation."

As he said the last words, the priest and Madame

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Graslin turned to walk back toward the plains, and the rector pointed both to the village at the foot of the hill, and to the château commanding the whole landscape. It was then half-past four o'clock; a glow of yellow sunlight enveloped the balustrade and the gardens, illuminated the château, sparkled on the gilded railings of the roof, lighted the long plain cut in two by the high-road, — a sad, gray ribbon, not bordered there by the fringe of trees which waved above it elsewhere on either side.

When Véronique and Monsieur Bonnet had passed the main body of the château, they could see — beyond the courtyard, the stables, and the offices — the great forest of Montégnac, along which the yellow glow was gliding like a soft caress. Though this last gleam of the setting sun touched the tree-tops only, it enabled the eye to see distinctly the caprices of that marvellous tapestry which nature makes of a forest in autumn. The oaks were a mass of Florentine bronze, the walnuts and the chestnuts displayed their blue-green tones, the early trees were putting on their golden foliage, and all these varied colors were shaded with the gray of barren spots. The trunks of trees already stripped of leafage showed their light-gray colonnades; the russet, tawny, grayish colors, artistically blended by the pale reflections of an October sun, harmonized with the vast uncultivated plain, green as stagnant water.

A thought came into the rector's mind as he looked at this fine spectacle, mute in other ways, — for not a tree rustled, not a bird chirped, death was on the plain, silence in the forest; here and there a little smoke from the village chimneys, that was all. The château seemed

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as gloomy as its mistress. By some strange law all things about a dwelling imitate the one who rules there; the owner's spirit hovers over it. Madame Graslin — her mind grasped by the rector's words, her soul struck by conviction, her heart affected in its tenderest emotions by the angelic quality of that pure voice — stopped short. The rector raised his arm and pointed to the forest. Véronique looked there.

"Do you not think it has a vague resemblance to social life?" he said. "To each its destiny. How many inequalities in that mass of trees! Those placed the highest lack earth and moisture; they die first."

"Some there are whom the shears of the woman gathering fagots cut short in their prime," she said bitterly.

"Do not fall back into those thoughts," said the rector sternly, though with indulgence still. "The misfortune of this forest is that it has never been cut. Do you see the phenomenon these masses present?"

Véronique, to whose mind the singularities of forest nature suggested little, looked obediently at the forest and then let her eyes drop gently back upon the rector.

"You do not notice," he said, perceiving from that look her total ignorance, "the lines where the trees of all species still hold their greenness?"

"Ah! true," she said. "I see them now. Why is it?"

"In that," replied the rector, "lies the future of Montégnac, and your own fortune, an immense fortune, as I once explained to Monsieur Graslin. You see the furrows of those three dells, the mountain streams of which flow into the torrent of the Gabou. That torrent separates the forest of Montégnac from the

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district which on this side adjoins ours. In September and October it goes dry, but in November it is full of water, the volume of which would be greatly increased by a partial clearing of the forest, so as to send all the lesser streams to join it. As it is, its waters do no good; but if one or two dams were made between the two hills on either side of it, as they have done at Riquet, and at Saint-Ferréol — where they have made immense reservoirs to feed the Languedoc canal — this barren plain could be fertilized by judicious irrigation through trenches and culverts managed by watergates; sending the water when needed over these lands, and diverting it at other times to our little river. You could plant fine poplars along these water-courses and raise the finest cattle on such pasturage as you would then obtain. What is grass, but sun and water? There is quite soil enough on the plains to hold the roots; the streams will furnish dew and moisture; the poplars will hold and feed upon the mists, returning their elements to the herbage; these are the secrets of the fine vegetation of valleys. If you undertook this work you would soon see life and joy and movement where silence now reigns, where the eye is saddened by barren fruitlessness. Would not that be a noble prayer to God? Such work would be a better occupation of your leisure than the indulgence of melancholy thoughts."

Véronique pressed the rector's hand, answering with four brief words, but they were grand ones: —

"It shall be done."

"You conceive the possibility of this great work," he went on; "but you cannot execute it. Neither

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you nor I have the necessary knowledge to accomplish an idea which might have come to all, but the execution of which presents immense difficulties; for simple as it may seem, the matter requires the most accurate science with all its resources. Seek, therefore, at once for the proper human instruments who will enable you within the next dozen years to get an income of six or seven thousand louis out of the six thousand acres you irrigate and fertilize. Such an enterprise will make Montégnac at some future day the most prosperous district in the department. The forest, as yet, yields you no return, but sooner or later commerce will come here in search of its fine woods — those treasures amassed by time; the only ones the production of which cannot be hastened or improved upon by man. The State may some day provide a way of transport from this forest, for many of the trees would make fine masts for the navy; but it will wait until the increasing population of Montégnac makes a demand upon its protection; for the State is like fortune, it comes only to the rich. This estate, well managed, will become, in course of time, one of the finest in France; it will be the pride of your grandson, who may then find the château paltry, comparing it with its revenues."

"Here," said Véronique, "is a future for my life."

"A beneficent work such as that will redeem wrongdoing," said the rector.

Seeing that she understood him, he attempted to strike another blow on this woman's intellect, judging rightly that in her the intellect led the heart, whereas in other women the heart is their road to intelligence.

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"Do you know," he said after a pause, "the error in which you are living?"

She looked at him timidly.

"Your repentance is as yet only a sense of defeat endured, — which is horrible, for it is nothing else than the despair of Satan; such, perhaps, was the repentance of mankind before the coming of Jesus Christ. But our repentance, the repentance of Christians, is the horror of a soul struck down on an evil path, to whom, by this very shock, God has revealed himself. You are like the pagan Orestes; make yourself another Paul."

"Your words have changed me utterly," she cried. "Now — oh! now I want to live."

"The spirit conquers," thought the modest rector, as he joyfully took his leave. He had cast nourishment before a soul hunted into secret despair by giving to its repentance the form of a good and noble action.

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## XII.

### THE SOUL OF FORESTS.

VÉRONIQUE wrote to Monsieur Grossetête on the morrow. A few days later she received from Limoges three saddle-horses sent by her old friend. Monsieur Bonnet found at Véronique's request, a young man, son of the postmaster, who was delighted to serve Véronique and earn good wages. This young fellow, small but active, with a round face, black eyes and hair, and named Maurice Champion, pleased Véronique very much and was immediately inducted into his office, which was that of taking care of the horses and accompanying his mistress on her excursions.

The head-forester of Montégnac was a former cavalry-sergeant in the Royal guard, born at Limoges, whom the Duc de Navarreins had sent to his estate at Montégnac to study its capabilities and value, in order that he might derive some profit from it. Jérôme Colorat found nothing but waste land utterly barren, woods unavailable for want of transportation, a ruined château, and enormous outlays required to restore the house and gardens. Alarmed, above all, by the beds of torrents strewn with granite rocks which seamed the forest, this honest but unintelligent agent was the real cause of the sale of the property.

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"Colorat," said Madame Graslin to her forester, for whom she had sent, "I shall probably ride out every morning, beginning with to-morrow. You know all the different parts of the land that belonged originally to this estate and those which Monsieur Graslin added to it: I wish you to go with me and point them out; for I intend to visit every part of the property myself."

The family within the château saw with joy the change that now appeared in Véronique's behavior. Without being told to do so, Aline got out her mistress's riding-habit and put it in good order for use. The next day Madame Sauviat felt unspeakable relief when her daughter left her room dressed to ride out.

Guided by the forester and Champion, who found their way by recollection, for the paths were scarcely marked on these unfrequented mountains, Madame Graslin started on the first day for the summits, intending to explore those only, so as to understand the watershed and familiarize herself with the lay of the ravines, the natural path of the torrents when they tore down the slopes. She wished to measure the task before her, — to study the land and the water-ways, and find for herself the essential points of the enterprise which the rector had suggested to her. She followed Colorat, who rode in advance; Champion was a few steps behind her.

So long as they were making their way through parts that were dense with trees, going up and down undulations of ground lying near to each other and very characteristic of the mountains of France, Véronique was lost in contemplation of the marvels of the forest.

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First came the venerable centennial trees, which amazed her till she grew accustomed to them; next, the full-grown younger trees reaching to their natural height; then, in some more open spot, a solitary pine-tree of enormous height; or — but this was rare — one of those flowering shrubs, dwarf elsewhere, but here attaining to gigantic development, and often as old as the soil itself. She saw, with a sensation quite unspeakable, a cloud rolling along the face of the bare rocks. She noticed the white furrows made down the mountain sides by the melting snows, which looked at a distance like scars and gashes. Passing through a gorge stripped of vegetation, she nevertheless admired, in the cleft flanks of the rocky slope, aged chestnuts as erect as the Alpine fir-trees.

The rapidity with which she advanced left her no time to take in all the varied scene, the vast moving sands, the quagmires boasting a few scattered trees, fallen granite bowlders, overhanging rocks, shaded valleys, broad open spaces with moss and heather still in bloom, (though some was dried), utter solitudes overgrown with juniper and caper-bushes; sometimes uplands with short grass, small spaces enriched by an oozing spring, — in short, much sadness, many splendors, things sweet, things strong, and all the singular aspects of mountainous Nature in the heart of France.

As she watched these many pictures, varied in form but all inspired with the same thought, the awful sadness of this Nature, so wild, so ruined, abandoned, fruitless, barren, filled her soul and answered to her secret feelings. And when, through an opening among the trees, she caught a glimpse of the plain below her,

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when she crossed some arid ravine over gravel and stones, where a few stunted bushes alone could grow, the spirit of this austere Nature came to her, suggesting observations new to her mind, derived from the many significations of this varied scene.

There is no spot in a forest which does not have its significance; not a glade, not a thicket but has its analogy with the labyrinth of human thought. Who is there among those whose minds are cultivated or whose hearts are wounded who can walk alone in a forest and the forest not speak to him? Insensibly a voice lifts itself, consoling or terrible, but oftener consoling than terrifying. If we seek the causes of the sensation — grave, simple, sweet, mysterious — that grasps us there, perhaps we shall find it in the sublime and artless spectacle of all these creations obeying their destiny and immutably submissive. Sooner or later the overwhelming sense of the permanence of Nature fills our hearts and stirs them deeply, and we end by being conscious of God. So it was with Véronique; in the silence of those summits, from the odor of the woods, the serenity of the air, she gathered — as she said that evening to Monsieur Bonnet — the certainty of God's mercy. She saw the possibility of an order of deeds higher than any to which her aspirations had ever reached. She felt a sort of happiness within her; it was long, indeed since she had known such a sense of peace. Did she owe that feeling to the resemblance she found between that barren landscape and the arid, exhausted regions of her soul? Had she seen those troubles of nature with a sort of joy, thinking that Nature was punished though it had not sinned? At

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any rate, she was powerfully affected; Colorat and Champion, following her at a little distance, thought her transfigured.

At a certain spot Véronique was struck with the stern harsh aspect of the steep and rocky beds of the dried-up torrents. She found herself longing to hear the sound of waters plashing through those scorched ravines.

"The need to love!" she murmured.

Ashamed of the words, which seemed to come to her like a voice, she pushed her horse boldly toward the first peak of the Corrèze, where, in spite of the forester's advice, she insisted on going. Telling her attendants to wait for her she went on alone to the summit, which is called the Roche-Vive, and stayed there for some time, studying the surrounding country. After hearing the secret voice of the many creations asking to live she now received within her the touch, the inspiration, which determined her to put into her work that wonderful perseverance displayed by Nature, of which she had herself already given many proofs.

She fastened her horse to a tree and seated herself on a large rock, letting her eyes rove over the broad expanse of barren plain, where Nature seemed a stepmother, — feeling in her heart the same stirrings of maternal love with which at times she gazed upon her infant. Prepared by this train of emotion, these half involuntary meditations (which, to use her own fine expression, winnowed her heart), to receive the sublime instruction offered by the scene before her, she awoke from her lethargy.

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"I understood then," she said afterwards to the rector, "that our souls must be ploughed and cultivated like the soil itself."

The vast expanse before her was lighted by a pale November sun. Already a few gray clouds chased by a chilly wind were hurrying from the west. It was then three o'clock. Véronique had taken four hours to reach the summit, but, like all others who are harrowed by an inward misery, she paid no heed to external circumstances. At this moment her being was actually growing and magnifying with the sublime impetus of Nature itself.

"Do not stay here any longer, madame," said a man, whose voice made her quiver, "or you will soon be unable to return; you are six miles from any dwelling, and the forest is impassable at night. But that is not your greatest danger. Before long the cold on this summit will become intense; the reason of this is unknown, but it has caused the death of many persons."

Madame Graslin saw below her a man's face, almost black with sunburn, in which shone eyes that were like two tongues of flame. On either side of this face hung a mass of brown hair, and below it was a fan-shaped beard. The man was raising respectfully one of those enormous broad-brimmed hats which are worn by the peasantry of central France, and in so doing displayed a bald but splendid forehead such as we sometimes see in wayside beggars. Véronique did not feel the slightest fear; the situation was one in which all the lesser considerations that make a woman timid had ceased.

"Why are you here?" she asked.

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"My home is near by," he answered.

"What can you do in such a desert?" she said.

"I live."

"But how? what means of living are there?"

"I earn a little something by watching that part of the forest," he answered, pointing to the other side of the summit from the one that overlooked Montégnac. Madame Graslin then saw the muzzle of a gun and also a game-bag. If she had had any fears this would have put an end to them.

"Then you are a keeper?" she said.

"No, madame; in order to be a keeper we must take a certain oath; and to take an oath we must have civic rights."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Farrabesche," he said, with deep humility, lowering his eyes to the ground.

Madame Graslin, to whom the name told nothing, looked at the man and noticed in his face, the expression of which was now very gentle, the signs of underlying ferocity; irregular teeth gave to the mouth, the lips blood-red, an ironical expression full of evil audacity; the dark and prominent cheek-bones had something animal about them. The man was of middle height, with strong shoulders, a thick-set neck, and the large hairy hands of violent men capable of using their strength in a brutal manner. His last words pointed to some mystery, to which his bearing, the expression of his countenance, and his whole person, gave a sinister meaning.

"You must be in my service, then?" said Véronique in a gentle voice.

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"Have I the honor of speaking to Madame Graslin?" asked Farrabesche.

"Yes, my friend," she answered.

Farrabesche instantly disappeared, with the rapidity of a wild animal, after casting a glance at his mistress that was full of fear.

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## XIII.

### FARRABESCHE.

Véronique hastened to mount her horse and rejoin the servants, who were beginning to be uneasy about her; for the strange unhealthiness of the Roche-Vive was well known throughout the neighborhood. Colorat begged his mistress to go down to the little valley which led to the plain. It would be dangerous, he said, to return by the hills, or by the tangled paths they had followed in the morning, where, even with his knowledge of the country, they were likely to be lost in the dusk.

Once on the plain Véronique rode slowly.

"Who is this Farrabesche whom you employ?" she asked her forester.

"Has madame met him?" cried Colorat.

"Yes, but he ran away from me."

"Poor man! perhaps he does not know how kind madame is."

"But what has he done?"

"Ah! madame, Farrabesche is a murderer," replied Champion, simply.

"Then they pardoned him!" said Véronique, in a trembling voice.

"No, madame," replied Colorat, "Farrabesche was

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tried and condemned to ten years at the galleys; he served half his time, and then he was released on parole and came here in 1827. He owes his life to the rector, who persuaded him to give himself up to justice. He had been condemned to death by default, and sooner or later he must have been taken and executed. Monsieur Bonnet went to find him in the woods, all alone, at the risk of being killed. No one knows what he said to Farrabesche. They were alone together two days; on the third day the rector brought Farrabesche to Tulle, where he gave himself up. Monsieur Bonnet went to see a good lawyer and begged him to do his best for the man. Farrabesche escaped with ten years in irons. The rector went to visit him in prison, and that dangerous fellow, who used to be the terror of the whole country, became as gentle as a girl; he even let them take him to the galleys without a struggle. On his return he settled here by the rector's advice; no one says a word against him; he goes to mass every Sunday and all the feast-days. Though his place is among us he slips in beside the wall and sits alone. He goes to the altar sometimes and prays, but when he takes the holy sacrament he always kneels apart."

"And you say that man killed another man?"

"One!" exclaimed Colorat; "he killed several! But he is a good man all the same."

"Is that possible?" exclaimed Véronique, letting the bridle fall on the neck of her horse.

"Well, you see, madame," said the forester, who asked no better than to tell the tale, "Farrabesche may have had good reason for what he did. He was the last of the Farrabesches, — an old family of the



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Corrèze, don't you know! His elder brother, Captain Farrabesche, died ten years earlier in Italy, at Montenotte, a captain when he was only twenty-two years old. Was n't that ill-luck? and such a lad, too! knew how to read and write, and bid fair to be a general. The family grieved terribly, and good reason, too. As for me, I heard all about his death, for I was serving at that time under L'AUTRE. Oh! he made a fine death, did Captain Farrabesche; he saved the army and the Little Corporal. I was then in the division of General Steingel, a German, — that is, an Alsacian, — a famous good general but rather short-sighted, and that was the reason why he was killed soon after Captain Farrabesche. The youngest brother — that 's this one — was only six years old when he heard of his brother's death. The second brother served too; but only as a private soldier; he died a sergeant in the first regiment of the Guard, at the battle of Austerlitz, where, d 'ye see, madame, they manœuvred just as quietly as they might in the Carrousel. I was there! oh! I had the luck of it! went through it all without a scratch! Now this Farrabesche of ours, though he 's a brave fellow, took it into his head he would n't go to the wars; in fact, the army was n't a healthy place for one of his family. So when the conscription caught him in 1811 he ran away, — a refractory, that 's what they called them. And then it was he went and joined a party of *chauffeurs*, or maybe he was forced to; at any rate he *chauffed!* Nobody but the rector knows what he really did with those brigands — all due respect to them! Many a fight he had with the gendarmes, and the soldiers too; I 'm told he was in seven regular battles —"

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"They say he killed two soldiers and three gendarmes," put in Champion.

"Who knows how many? — he never told," went on Colorat. "At last, madame, they caught nearly all his comrades, but they never could catch him; hang him! he was so young and active, and knew the country so well, he always escaped. The *chauffeurs* he consorted with kept themselves mostly in the neighborhood of Brives and Tulle; sometimes they came down this way, because Farrabesche knew such good hiding-places about here. In 1814 the conscription took no further notice of him, because it was abolished; but for all that, he was obliged to live in the woods in 1815; because, don't you see? as he had n't enough to live on, he helped to stop a mail-coach over there, down that gorge; and then it was they condemned him. But, as I told you just now, the rector persuaded him to give himself up. It was n't easy to convict him, for nobody dared testify against him; and his lawyer and Monsieur Bonnet worked so hard they got him sentenced for ten years only; which was pretty good luck after being a *chauffeur* — for he did *chauffe*."

"Will you tell me what *chauffeur* means?"

"If you wish it, madame, I will tell you what they did, as far as I know about it from others, for I never was *chauffed* myself. It was n't a good thing to do, but necessity knows no law. Well, this is how it was: seven or eight would go to some farmer or land-owner who was thought to have money; the farmer would build a good fire and give them a supper, lasting half through the night, and then, when the feast was over, if the master of the house would n't give them the sum

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demanded, they just fastened his feet to the spit, and did n't unfasten them till they got it. That 's how it was. They always went masked. Among all their expeditions they sometimes made unlucky ones. Hang it, there 'll always be obstinate, miserly old fellows in the world! One of them, a farmer, old Cochegrue, so mean he 'd shave an egg, held out; he let them roast his feet. Well, he died of it. The wife of Monsieur David, near Brives, died of terror at merely seeing those fellows tie her husband's feet. She died saying to David: 'Give them all you have.' He would n't, and so she just pointed out the hiding-place. The *chauffeurs* (that 's why they call them *chauffeurs*, — warmers) were the terror of the whole country for over five years. But you must get it well into your head, — oh, excuse me, madame, but you must know that more than one young man of good family belonged to them, though somehow they were never the ones to be caught."

Madame Graslin listened without interrupting or replying. There was silence for a few moments, and then little Champion, jealous of the right to amuse his mistress, wanted to tell what he knew of the late galley-slave.

"Madame ought to know more about Farrabesche; he has n't his equal at running, or at riding a horse. He can kill an ox with a blow of his fist; nobody can shoot like him; he can carry seven hundred feet as straight as a die, — there! One day they surprised him with three of his comrades; two were wounded, one was killed, — good! Farrabesche was all but taken. Bah! he just sprang on the horse of one of the gendarmes

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behind the man, pricked the horse with his knife, made it run with all its might, and so disappeared, holding the gendarme tight round the body. But he held him so tight that after a time he threw the body on the ground and rode away alone on the horse and master of the horse; and he had the cheek to go and sell it not thirty miles from Limoges! After that affair he hid himself for three months and was never seen. The authorities offered a hundred golden louis to whoever would deliver him up."

"Another time," added Colorat, "when the prefect of Tulle offered a hundred louis for him, he made one of his own cousins, Giriex of Vizay, earn them. His cousin denounced him, and appeared to deliver him up. Oh, yes, he delivered him sure enough! The gendarmes were delighted, and took him to Tulle; there they put him in the prison of Lubersac, from which he escaped that very night, profiting by a hole already begun by one of his accomplices who had been executed. All these adventures gave Farrabesche a fine reputation. The *chauffeurs* had lots of outside friends; people really loved them. They were not skinflints like those of to-day; they spent their money royally, those fellows! Just fancy, madame, one evening Farrabesche was chased by gendarmes; well, he escaped them by staying twenty minutes under water in the pond of a farm-yard. He breathed air through a straw which he kept above the surface of the pool, which was half muck. But, goodness! what was that little disagreeableness to a man who spends his nights in the tree-tops, where the sparrows can hardly hold themselves, watching the soldiers going to and fro in search of him

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below? Farrabesche was one of the half-dozen *chauf. feurs* whom the officers of justice could never lay hands on. But as he belonged to the region and was brought up with them, and had, as they said, only fled the conscription, all the women were on his side, — and that 's a great deal, you know."

"Is it really certain that Farrabesche did kill several persons?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Yes, certain," replied Colorat; "it is even said that it was he who killed the traveller by the mail-coach in 1812; but the courier and the postilion, the only witnesses who could have identified him, were dead before he was tried."

"Tried for the robbery?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Yes, they took everything; amongst it twenty-five thousand francs belonging to the government."

Madame Graslin rode silently after that for two or three miles. The sun had now set, the moon was lighting the gray plain, which looked like an open sea. Champion and Colorat began to wonder at Madame Graslin, whose silence seemed strange to them, and they were greatly astonished to see the shining track of tears upon her cheeks; her eyes were red and full of tears, which were falling drop by drop as she rode along.

"Oh, madame," said Colorat, "don't pity him! The lad has had his day. He had pretty girls in love with him; and now, though to be sure he is closely watched by the police, he is protected by the respect and goodwill of the rector; for he has really repented. His conduct at the galleys was exemplary. Everybody knows he is as honest as the most honest man among

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us. Only he is proud; he does n't choose to expose himself to rebuff; so he lives quietly by himself, and does good in his own way. He has made a nursery of about ten acres for you on the other side of the Roche-Vive; he plants in the forests wherever he thinks there 's a chance of making a tree grow; he trims the trees and cuts out the dead wood, and ties it up into bundles for the poor. All the poor people know they can get their wood from him all cut and ready to burn; so they go and ask him for it, instead of taking it themselves and injuring your forest. He is another kind of *chauffeur* now, and warms his poor neighbors to their comfort and not to their harm. Oh, Farrabesche loves your forest! He takes care of it as if it were his own property."

"And he lives — all alone?" exclaimed Madame Graslin, adding the two last words hastily.

"Excuse me, not quite alone, madame; he takes care of a boy about fifteen years old," said Maurice Champion.

"Yes, that 's so," said Colorat; "La Curieux gave birth to the child some little time before Farrabesche was condemned."

"Is it his child?" asked Madame Graslin.

"People think so."

"Why did n't he marry her?"

"How could he? They would certainly have arrested him. As it was, when La Curieux heard he was sentenced to the galleys the poor girl left this part of the country."

"Was she a pretty girl?"

"Oh!" said Maurice, "my mother says she was very

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like another girl who has also left Montégnac for something the same reason, — Denise Tascheron."

"She loved him?" said Madame Graslin.

"Ha, yes! because he *chauffed;* women do like things that are out of the way. However, nothing ever did surprise the community more than that love affair. Catherine Curieux lived as virtuous a life as a holy virgin; she passed for a pearl of purity in her village of Vizay, which is really a small town in the Corrèze on the line between the two departments. Her father and mother are farmers to the Messieurs Brézac. Catherine Curieux was about seventeen when Farrabesche was sent to the galleys. The Farrabesches were an old family from the same region, who settled in the commune of Montégnac; they hired their farm from the village. The father and mother Farrabesche are dead, but Catherine's three sisters are married, one in Aubusson, another in Limoges and a third in Saint-Léonard."

"Do you think Farrabesche knows where Catherine is?" asked Madame Graslin.

"If he did know he'd break his parole. Oh! he'd go to her. As soon as he came back from the galleys he got Monsieur Bonnet to ask for the little boy whom the grandfather and grandmother were taking care of; and Monsieur Bonnet obtained the child."

"Does no one know what became of the mother?"

"No one," said Colorat. "The girl felt she was ruined; she was afraid to stay in her own village. She went to Paris. What is she doing there? Well, that's the question; but you might as well hunt for a marble among the stones on that plain as look for her there."

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They were now riding up the ascent to the château as Colorat pointed to the plain below. Madame Sauviat, evidently uneasy, Aline and the other servants were waiting at the gate, not knowing what to think of this long absence.

"My dear," said Madame Sauviat, helping her daughter to dismount, "you must be very tired."

"No, mother," replied Madame Graslin, in so changed a voice that Madame Sauviat looked closely at her and then saw the mark of tears.

Madame Graslin went to her own rooms with Aline, who took her orders for all that concerned her personal life. She now shut herself up and would not even admit her mother; when Madame Sauviat asked to enter, Aline stopped her, saying, "Madame has gone to sleep."

The next day Véronique rode out attended by Maurice only. In order to reach the Roche-Vive as quickly as possible she took the road by which she had returned the night before. As they rode up the gorge which lies between the mountain peak and the last hill of the forest (for, seen from the plain, the Roche-Vive looks isolated) Véronique requested Maurice to show her the house in which Farrabesche lived and then to hold the horses and wait for her; she wished to go alone. Maurice took her to a path which led down on the other side of the Roche-Vive and showed her the thatched roof of a dwelling half buried in the mountain, below which lay the nursery grounds. It was then about mid-day. A light smoke issued from the chimney. Véronique reached the cottage in a few moments, but she did not make her presence known at once. She stood a few

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moments lost in thoughts known only to herself as she gazed on the modest dwelling which stood in the middle of a garden inclosed with a hedge of thorns.

Beyond the lower end of the garden lay several acres of meadow land surrounded by an evergreen hedge; the eye looked down on the flattened tops of fruit trees, apple, pear, and plum trees scattered here and there among these fields. Above the house, toward the crest of the mountain where the soil became sandy, rose the yellow crowns of a splendid grove of chestnuts. Opening the railed gate made of half rotten boards which inclosed the premises, Madame Graslin saw a stable, a small poultry-yard and all the picturesque and living accessories of poor homes, which have so much of rural poesy about them. Who could see without emotion the linen fluttering on the hedges, the bunches of onions hanging from the eaves, the iron saucepans drying in the sun, the wooden bench overhung with honeysuckle, the stone-crop clinging to the thatch, as it does on the roofs of nearly all the cottages in France, revealing a humble life that is almost vegetative?

It was impossible for Véronique to come upon her keeper without his receiving due notice; two fine hunting dogs began to bark as soon as the rustling of her habit was heard on the dried leaves. She took the end of it over her arm and advanced toward the house. Farrabesche and his boy, who were sitting on a wooden bench outside the door, rose and uncovered their heads, standing in a respectful attitude, but without the least appearance of servility.

"I have heard," said Véronique, looking attentively at the boy, "that you take much care of my interests;

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I wished to see your house and the nurseries, and ask you a few questions relating to the improvements I intend to make."

"I am at madame's orders," replied Farrabesche.

Véronique admired the boy, who had a charming face of a perfect oval, rather sunburned and brown but very regular in features, the forehead finely modelled, orange-colored eyes of extreme vivacity, black hair cut straight across the brow and allowed to hang down on either side of the face. Taller than most boys of his age, the little fellow was nearly five feet high. His trousers, like his shirt, were of coarse gray linen, his waistcoat, of rough blue cloth with horn buttons much worn and a jacket of the cloth so oddly called Maurienne velvet, with which the Savoyards like to clothe themselves, stout hob-nailed shoes, and no stockings. This costume was exactly like that of his father, except that Farrabesche had on his head the broad-brimmed felt hat of the peasantry, while the boy had only a brown woollen cap.

Though intelligent and animated, the child's face was instinct with the gravity peculiar to all human beings of any age who live in solitude; he seemed to put himself in harmony with the life and the silence of the woods. Both Farrabesche and his son were specially developed on their physical side, possessing many of the characteristics of savages, — piercing sight, constant observation, absolute self-control, a keen ear, wonderful agility, and an intelligent manner of speaking. At the first glance the boy gave his father Madame Graslin recognized one of those unbounded affections in which instinct blends with thought, and a

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most active happiness strengthens both the will of the instinct and the reasoning of thought.

"This must be the child I have heard of," said Véronique, motioning to the boy.

"Yes, madame."

"Have you made no attempt to find his mother?" asked Véronique, making a sign to Farrabesche to follow her a little distance.

"Madame may not be aware that I am not allowed to go beyond the district in which I reside."

"Have you never received any news of her?"

"At the expiration of my term," he answered, "I received from the Commissioner a thousand francs, sent to him quarterly for me in little sums which police regulations did not allow me to receive till the day I left the galleys. I think that Catherine alone would have thought of me, as it was not Monsieur Bonnet who sent this money; therefore I have kept it safely for Benjamin."

"And Catherine's parents?"

"They have never inquired for her since she left. Besides they did enough in taking charge of the little one."

"Well, Farrabesche," said Véronique, returning toward the house, "I will make it my business to know if Catherine still lives; and if so, what is her present mode of life."

"Oh! madame, whatever that may be," said the man gently, "it would be happiness to me if I could have her for my wife. It is for her to object, not me. Our marriage would legitimatize this poor boy, who as yet knows nothing of his position."

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The look the father threw upon the lad explained the life of these two beings, abandoned, or voluntarily isolated; they were all in all to each other, like two compatriots adrift upon a desert.

"Then you love Catherine?" said Véronique.

"Even if I did not love her, madame," he replied, "she is to me, in my situation, the only woman there is in the world."

Madame Graslin turned hurriedly and walked away under the chestnut trees, as if attacked by some sharp pain; the keeper, thinking she was moved by a sudden caprice, did not venture to follow her.

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## XIV.

### THE TORRENT OF THE GABOU.

VÉRONIQUE remained for some minutes under the chestnut trees, apparently looking at the landscape. Thence she could see that portion of the forest which clothes the side of the valley down which flows the torrent of the Gabou, now dry, a mass of stones, looking like a huge ditch cut between the wooded mountains of Montégnac and another chain of parallel hills beyond, — the latter being much steeper and without vegetation, except for heath and juniper and a few sparse trees toward their summit.

These hills, desolate of aspect, belong to the neighboring domain and are in the department of the Corrèze. A country road, following the undulations of the valley, serves to mark the line between the arrondissement of Montégnac and the two estates. This barren slope supports, like a wall, a fine piece of woodland which stretches away in the distance from its rocky summit. Its barrenness forms a complete contrast to the other slope, on which is the cottage of Farrabesche. On the one side, harsh, disfigured angularities, on the other, graceful forms and curving outlines; there, the cold, dumb stillness of unfruitful earth held up by horizontal blocks of stone and naked rock, here, trees of various greens, now stripped for the

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most part of foliage, but showing their fine straight many-colored trunks on every slope and terrace of the land; their interlacing branches swaying to the breeze. A few more persistent trees, oaks, elms, beeches, and chestnuts, still retained their yellow, bronzed, or crimsoned foliage.

Toward Montégnac, where the valley widened immensely, the two slopes form a horse-shoe; and from the spot where Véronique now stood leaning against a tree she could see the descending valleys lying like the gradations of an amphitheatre, the tree-tops rising from each tier like persons in the audience. This fine landscape was then on the other side of her park, though it afterwards formed part of it. On the side toward the cottage near which she stood the valley narrows more and more until it becomes a gorge, about a hundred feet wide.

The beauty of this view, over which Madame Graslin's eyes now roved mechanically, recalled her presently to herself. She returned to the cottage where the father and son were standing, silently awaiting her and not seeking to explain her singular absence.

She examined the house, which was built with more care than its thatched roof seemed to warrant. It had, no doubt, been abandoned ever since the Navarreins ceased to care for this domain. No more hunts, no more game-keepers. Though the house had been built for over a hundred years, the walls were still good, notwithstanding the ivy and other sorts of climbing-plants which clung to them. When Farrabesche obtained permission to live there he tiled the room on the lower floor and put in furniture. Véronique saw, as she en-

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tered, two beds, a large walnut wardrobe, a bread-box, dresser, table, three chairs, and on the dresser a few brown earthenware dishes and other utensils necessary to life. Above the fireplace were two guns and two gamebags. A number of little things evidently made by the father for the child touched Véronique's heart — the model of a man-of-war, of a sloop, a carved wooden cup, a wooden box of exquisite workmanship, a coffer inlaid in diaper pattern, a crucifix, and a splendid rosary. The chaplet was made of plum-stones, on each of which was carved a head of marvellous delicacy, — of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, the Madonna, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne, the two Magdalens, etc.

"I do that to amuse the little one in the long winter evenings," he said, as if excusing himself.

The front of the house was covered with jessamine and roses, trained to the wall and wreathing the windows of the upper floor, where Farrabesche stored his provisions. He bought little except bread, salt, sugar, and a few such articles, for he kept chickens, ducks, and two pigs. Neither he nor the boy drank wine.

"All that I have heard of you and all that I now see," said Madame Graslin at last, "make me feel an interest in your welfare which will not, I hope, be a barren one."

"I recognize Monsieur Bonnet's kindness in what you say," cried Farrabesche, in a tone of feeling.

"You are mistaken; the rector has not yet spoken of you to me; chance — or God — has done it."

"Yes, madame, God! God alone can do miracles for a miserable man like me."

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*" He kissed the hem of Madame Graslin's habit, then her feet."*

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Laurent Desrousseaux

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Procede Coupil

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"If you have been a miserable man," said Madame Graslin, lowering her voice that the child might not hear her (an act of womanly delicacy which touched his heart), "your repentance, your conduct, and the rector's esteem have now fitted you to become a happier man. I have given orders to finish the building of the large farmhouse which Monsieur Graslin intended to establish near the château. I shall make you my farmer, and you will have an opportunity to use all your faculties, and also to employ your son. The *procureur-général* in Limoges shall be informed about you, and the humiliating police-inspection you are now subjected to shall be removed. I promise you."

At these words Farrabesche fell on his knees, as if struck down by the realization of a hope he had long considered vain. He kissed the hem of Madame Graslin's habit, then her feet. Seeing the tears in his father's eyes, the boy wept too, without knowing why.

"Rise, Farrabesche," said Madame Graslin, "you do not know how natural it is that I should do for you what I have promised. You planted those fine trees, did you not?" she went on, pointing to the groups of Northern pine, firs, and larches at the foot of the dry and rocky hill directly opposite.

"Yes, madame."

"Is the earth better there?"

"The water in washing down among the rocks brings a certain amount of soil, which it deposits. I have profited by this; for the whole of the level of the valley belongs to you, — the road is your boundary."

"Is there much water at the bottom of that long valley?"



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"Oh, madame," cried Farrabesche, "before long, when the rains begin, you will hear the torrent roar even at the château; but even that is nothing to what happens in spring when the snows melt. The water then rushes down from all parts of the forest behind Montégnac, from those great slopes which are back of the hills on which you have your park. All the water of these mountains pours into this valley and makes a deluge. Luckily for you, the trees hold the earth; otherwise the land would slide into the valley."

"Where are the springs?" asked Madame Graslin, giving her full attention to what he said.

Farrabesche pointed to a narrow gorge which seemed to end the valley just below his house. "They are mostly on a clay plateau lying between the Limousin and the Corrèze; they are mere green pools during the summer, and lose themselves in the soil. No one lives in that unhealthy region. The cattle will not eat the grass or reeds that grow near the brackish water. That vast tract, which has more than three thousand acres in it, is an open common for three districts; but, like the plains of Montégnac, no use can be made of it. This side on your property, as I showed you, there is a little earth among the stones, but over there is nothing but sandy rock."

"Send your boy for the horses; I will ride over and see it for myself."

Benjamin departed, after Madame Graslin had shown him the direction in which he would find Maurice and the horses.

"You who know, so they tell me, every peculiarity of the country thoroughly," continued Madame Graslin,

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"explain to me how it is that the streams of my forest which are on the side of the mountain toward Montégnac, and ought therefore to send their waters down there, do not do so, neither in regular water-courses nor in sudden torrents after rains and the melting of the snows."

"Ah, madame," said Farrabesche, "the rector, who thinks all the time about the welfare of Montégnac, has guessed the reason, but he can't find any proof of it. Since your arrival, he has made me trace the path of the water from point to point through each ravine and valley. I was returning yesterday, when I had the honor of meeting you, from the base of the Roche-Vive, where I carefully examined the lay of the land. Hearing the horses' feet, I came up to see who was there. Monsieur Bonnet is not only a saint, madame; he is a man of great knowledge. 'Farrabesche,' he said to me (I was then working on the road the village has just built to the château, and the rector came to me and pointed to that chain of hills from Montégnac to Roche-Vive),—'Farrabesche,' he said, 'there must be some reason why that water-shed does not send any of its water to the plain; Nature must have made some sluiceway which carries it elsewhere.' Well, madame, that idea is so simple you would suppose any child might have thought it; yet no one since Montégnac existed, neither the great lords, nor their bailiffs, nor their foresters, nor the poor, nor the rich, none of those who saw that plain barren for want of water, ever asked themselves why the streams which now feed the Gabou do not come there. The three districts above, which have constantly been afflicted with fevers in con-

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sequence of stagnant water, never looked for the remedy; I myself, who live in the wilds, never dreamed of it; it needed a man of God."

The tears filled his eyes as he said the word.

"All that men of genius discover," said Madame Graslin, "seems so simple that every one thinks they might have discovered it themselves. But," she added, as if to herself, "genius has this fine thing about it, — it resembles all the world, but no one resembles it."

"I understood Monsieur Bonnet at once," continued Farrabesche; "it did not take him many words to tell me what I had to do. Madame, this fact I tell you of is all the more singular because there are, toward the plain, great rents and fissures in the mountain, gorges and ravines down which the water flows; but, strange to say, these clefts and ravines and gorges all send their streams into a little valley which is several feet below the level of your plain. To-day I have discovered the reason of this phenomenon: from the Roche-Vive to Montégnac, at the foot of the mountains, runs a shelf or barricade of rock, varying in height from twenty to thirty feet; there is not a break in it from end to end; and it is formed of a species of rock which Monsieur Bonnet calls schist. The soil above it, which is of course softer than the rock, has been hollowed out by the action of the water, which is turned at right angles by the barricade of rock, and thus flows naturally into the Gabou. The trees and underbrush of the forest conceal this formation and the hollowing out of the soil. But after following the course of the water, as I have done by the traces left of its passage, it is easy to convince any one of the fact. The Gabou thus receives the water-

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shed of both mountains, — that which ought to go down the mountain face on which your park and garden are to the plain, and that which comes down the rocky slopes before us. According to Monsieur Bonnet the present state of things will cease when the water-shed toward the plain gains a natural outlet, and is dammed toward the Gabou by the earth and rocks which the mountain torrents bring down with them. It will take a hundred years to do that, however; and besides, it is n't desirable. If your soil will not take up more water than the great common you are now going to see, Montégnac would be full of stagnant pools, breeding fever in the community."

"I suppose that the places Monsieur Bonnet showed me the other day where the foliage of the trees is still green mark the present conduits by which the water falls into the Gabou?"

"Yes, madame. Between Roche-Vive and Montégnac there are three distinct mountains with three hollows between them, down which the waters, stopped by the schist barrier, turn off into the Gabou. The belt of trees still green at the foot of the hill above the barrier, which looks, at a distance, like a part of the plain, is really the water-sluice the rector supposed, very justly, that Nature had made for herself."

"Well, what has been to the injury of Montégnac shall soon be its prosperity," said Madame Graslin, in a tone of deep intention. "And inasmuch as you have been the first instrument employed on the work, you shall share in it; you shall find me faithful, industrious workmen; lack of money can always be made up by devotion and good work."

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Benjamin and Maurice came up as Véronique ended these words; she mounted her horse and signed to Farrabesche to mount the other.

"Guide me," she said, "to the place where the waters spread out in pools over that waste land."

"There is all the more reason why madame should go there," said Farrabesche, "because the late Monsieur Graslin, under the rector's advice, bought three hundred acres at the opening of that gorge, on which the waters have left sediment enough to make good soil over quite a piece of ground. Madame will also see the opposite side of the Roche-Vive, where there are fine woods, among which Monsieur Graslin would no doubt have put a farm had he lived; there's an excellent place for one, where the spring which rises just by my house loses itself below."

Farrabesche rode first to show the way, taking Véronique through a path which led to the spot where the two slopes drew closely together and then flew apart, one to the east the other to the west, as if repulsed by a shock. This narrow passage, filled with large rocks and coarse, tall grasses, was only about sixty feet in width.

The Roche-Vive, cut perpendicularly on this side looked like a wall of granite in which there was no foothold; but above this inflexible wall was a crown of trees, the roots of which hung down it, mostly pines clinging to the rock with their forked feet like birds on a bough.

The opposite hill, hollowed by time, had a frowning front, sandy, rocky, and yellow; here were shallow caverns, dips without depth; the soft and pulverizing rock had ochre tones. A few plants with prickly leaves

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above, and burdocks, reeds, and aquatic growths below, were indication enough of the northern exposure and the poverty of the soil. The bed of the torrent was of stone, quite hard, but yellow. Evidently the two chains, though parallel and ripped asunder by one of the great catastrophes which have changed the face of the globe, were, either from some inexplicable caprice or for some unknown reason, the discovery of which awaited genius, composed of elements that were wholly dissimilar. The contrast of their two natures showed more clearly here than elsewhere.

Véronique now saw before her an immense dry plateau, without any vegetation, chalky (this explained the absorption of the water) and strewn with pools of stagnant water and rocky places stripped of soil. To the right were the mountains of the Corrèze; to left the Roche-Vive barred the view covered with its noble trees; on its further slope was a meadow of some two hundred acres, the verdure of which contrasted with the hideous aspect of the desolate plateau.

"My son and I cut that ditch you see down there marked by the tall grasses," said Farrabesche; "it joins the one which bounds your forest. On this side the estate is bounded by a desert, for the nearest village is three miles distant."

Véronique turned rapidly to the dismal plain, followed by her guide. She leaped her horse across the ditch and rode at full gallop across the drear expanse, seeming to take a savage pleasure in contemplating that vast image of desolation. Farrabesche was right. No power, no will could put to any use whatever that soil which resounded under the horses' feet as though it

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were hollow. This effect was produced by the natural porousness of the clay; but there were fissures also through which the water flowed away, no doubt to some distant sources.

"There are many souls like this," thought Véronique, stopping her horse after she had ridden at full speed for fifteen or twenty minutes. She remained motionless and thoughtful in the midst of this desert, where there was neither animal nor insect life and where the birds never flew. The plain of Montégnac was at least pebbly or sandy; on it were places where a few inches of soil did give a foothold for the roots of certain plants; but here the ungrateful chalk, neither stone nor earth, repelled even the eye, which was forced to turn for relief to the blue of the ether.

After examining the bounds of her forest and the meadows purchased by her husband, Véronique returned toward the outlet of the Gabou, but slowly. She then saw Farrabesche gazing into a sort of ditch which looked like one a speculator might have dug into this desolate corner of the earth expecting Nature to give up some hidden treasure.

"What is the matter?" asked Véronique, noticing on that manly face an expression of deep sadness.

"Madame, I owe my life to that ditch; or rather, to speak more correctly, I owe to it time for repentance, time to redeem my sins in the eyes of men."

This method of explaining life so affected Madame Graslin that she stopped her horse on the brink of the ditch.

"I was hiding there, madame. The ground is so resonant that when my ear was against it I could hear

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the horses of the gendarmerie, or even the footsteps of the soldiers, which are always peculiar. That gave me time to escape up the Gabou to a place where I had a horse, and I always managed to put several miles between myself and my pursuers. Catherine used to bring me food during the night; if she did not find me I always found the bread and wine in a hole covered with a rock."

This recollection of his wandering and criminal life, which might have injured Farrabesche with some persons, met with the most indulgent pity from Madame Graslin. She rode hastily on toward the Gabou, followed by her guide. While she measured with her eye this opening, through which could be seen the long valley, so smiling on one side, so ruined on the other, and at its lower end, a league away, the terraced hill-sides back of Montégnac, Farrabesche said: —

"There 'll be a famous rush of water in a few days."

"And next year, on this day, not a drop shall flow there. Both sides belong to me, and I will build a dam solid enough and high enough to stop the freshet. Instead of a valley yielding nothing, I will have a lake twenty, thirty, forty feet deep over an extent of three or four miles, — an immense reservoir, which shall supply the flow of irrigation with which I will fertilize the plain of Montégnac."

"Ah, madame! the rector was right, when he said to us as we finished our road, 'You are working for a mother.' May God shed his blessing on such an undertaking."

"Say nothing about it, Farrabesche," said Madame Graslin. "The idea was Monsieur Bonnet's."

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They returned to the cottage, where Véronique picked up Maurice, with whom she rode hastily back to the château. When Madame Sauviat and Aline saw her they were struck with the change in her countenance; the hope of doing good in the region she now owned gave her already an appearance of happiness. She wrote at once to Monsieur Grossetête, begging him to ask Monsieur de Grandville for the complete release of the returned convict, on whose conduct she gave him assurances which were confirmed by a certificate from the mayor of Montégnac and by a letter from Monsieur Bonnet. To this request she added information about Catherine Curieux, begging Grossetête to interest the *procureur général* in the good work she wished to do, and persuade him to write to the prefecture of police in Paris to recover traces of the girl. The circumstance of Catherine's having sent money to Farrabesche at the galleys ought to be clew enough to furnish information. Véronique was determined to know why it was that the young woman had not returned to her child and to Farrabesche, now that he was free. She also told her old friend of her discovery about the torrent of the Gabou, and urged him to select an able engineer, such as she had already asked him to procure for her.

The next day was Sunday, and for the first time since her installation at Montégnac Véronique felt able to hear mass in church; she accordingly went there and took possession of the bench that belonged to her in the chapel of the Virgin. Seeing how denuded the poor church was, she resolved to devote a certain sum yearly to the needs of the building and the decoration

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of the altars. She listened to the sweet, impressive, angelic voice of the rector, whose sermon, though couched in simple language suited to the rustic intellects before him, was sublime in character. Sublimity comes from the heart, intellect has little to do with it; religion is a quenchless source of this sublimity which has no dross; for Catholicism entering and changing all hearts, is itself all heart. Monsieur Bonnet took his text from the epistle for the day, which signified that, sooner or later, God accomplishes all promises, assisting His faithful ones, encouraging the righteous. He made plain to every mind the great things which might be accomplished by wealth judiciously used for the good of others, — explaining that the duties of the poor to the rich were as widely extended as those of the rich to the poor, and that the aid and assistance given should be mutual.

Farrabesche had made known to a few of those who treated him in a friendly manner (the result of the Christian charity which Monsieur Bonnet had put in practice among his parishioners) the benevolent acts Madame Graslin had done for him. Her conduct in this matter had been talked over by all the little groups of persons assembled round the church door before the service, as is the custom in country places. Nothing could have been better calculated to win the friendship and good-will of these eminently susceptible minds; so that when Véronique left the church after service she found nearly all the inhabitants of the parish formed in two hedges through which she was expected to pass. One and all they bowed respectfully in profound silence. She was deeply touched by this reception, without

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knowing the actual cause of it. Seeing Farrabesche humbly stationed among the last, she stopped and said to him: —

"You are a good hunter; do not forget to supply me with game."

A few days later Véronique went to walk with the rector through the part of the forest that was nearest the château, wishing to descend with him the terraced slopes she had seen from the house of Farrabesche. In doing this she obtained complete certainty as to the nature of the upper affluents of the Gabou. The rector saw for himself that the streams which watered certain parts of upper Montégnac came from the mountains of the Corrèze. This chain of hills joined the barren slopes we have already described, parallel with the chain of the Roche-Vive.

On returning from this walk the rector was joyful as a child; he foresaw, with the naïveté of a poet, the prosperity of his dear village — for a poet is a man, is he not? who realizes hopes before they ripen. Monsieur Bonnet garnered his hay as he stood overlooking that barren plain from Madame Graslin's upper terrace.

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## XV.

### STORY OF A GALLEY-SLAVE.

THE next day Farrabesche and his son came to the château with game. The keeper also brought, for Francis, a cocoanut cup, elaborately carved, a genuine work of art, representing a battle. Madame Graslin was walking at the time on the terrace, in the direction which overlooked Les Tascherons. She sat down on a bench, took the cup in her hand and looked earnestly at the deft piece of work. A few tears came into her eyes.

"You must have suffered very much," she said to Farrabesche, after a few moments' silence.

"How could I help it, madame?" he replied; "for I was there without the hope of escape, which supports the life of most convicts."

"An awful life!" she said in a tone of horror, inviting Farrabesche by word and gesture to say more.

Farrabesche took the convulsive trembling and other signs of emotion he saw in Madame Graslin for the powerful interest of compassionate curiosity in himself.

Just then Madame Sauviat appeared, coming down a path as if she meant to join them; but Véronique drew out her handkerchief and made a negative sign; saying, with an asperity she had never before shown to the old woman:—

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"Leave me, leave me, mother."

"Madame," said Farrabesche, "for ten years I wore there (holding out his leg) a chain fastened to a great iron ring which bound me to another man. During my time I had to live thus with three different convicts. I slept on a wooden bench; I had to work extraordinarily hard to earn a little mattress called a *serpentin*. Each dormitory contains eight hundred men. Each bed, called a *tolard*, holds twenty-four men, chained in couples. Every night the chain of each couple is passed round another great chain which is called the *filet de ramas*. This chain holds all the couples by the feet, and runs along the bottom of the *tolard*. It took me over two years to get accustomed to that iron clanking, which called out incessantly, 'Thou art a galley-slave!' If I slept an instant some vile companion moved or quarrelled, reminding me of where I was. There is a terrible apprenticeship to make before a man can learn how to sleep. I myself could not sleep until I had come to the end of my strength and to utter exhaustion. When at last sleep came I had the nights in which to forget. Oh! to *forget*, madame, that was something! Once there, a man must learn to satisfy his needs, even in the smallest things, according to the ways laid down by pitiless regulations. Imagine, madame, the effect such a life produced on a lad like me, who had lived in the woods with the birds and the squirrels! If I had not already lived for six months within prison-walls, I should, in spite of Monsieur Bonnet's grand words — for he, I can truly say, is the father of my soul — I should, ah! I must have flung myself into the sea at the mere sight of my companions.

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Out-doors I still could live; but in the building, whether to sleep or to eat, — to eat out of buckets, and each bucket filled for three couples, — it was life no longer, it was death; the atrocious faces and language of my companions were always insufferable to me. Happily, from five o'clock in summer, and from half-past seven o'clock in winter we went, in spite of heat or cold and wind or rain, on 'fatigue,' that is, hard-labor. Thus half this life was spent in the open air; and the air was sweet after the close dormitory packed with eight hundred convicts. And that air, too, is sea-air! We could enjoy the breezes, we could be friends with the sun, we could watch the clouds as they passed above us, we could hope and pray for fine weather! As for me, I took an interest in my work — "

Farrabesche stopped; two heavy tears were rolling down his mistress's face.

"Oh! madame, I have only told you the best side of that life," he continued, taking the expression of her face as meant for him. "The terrible precautions taken by the government, the constant spying of the keepers, the blacksmith's inspection of the chains every day, night and morning, the coarse food, the hideous garments which humiliate a man at all hours, the comfortless sleep, the horrible rattling of eight hundred chains in that resounding hall, the prospect of being shot or blown to pieces by cannon if ten of those villains took a fancy to revolt, all those dreadful things are nothing, — nothing, I tell you; that is the bright side only. There 's another side, madame, and a decent man, a bourgeois, would die of horror in a week. A convict is forced to live with another man; obliged

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to endure the company of five other men at every meal, twenty-three in his bed at night, and to hear their language! The great society of galley-slaves, madame, has its secret laws; disobey them and you are tortured; obey them, and you become a torturer. You must be either victim or executioner. If they would kill you at once it would at least be the cure of life. But no, they are wiser than that in doing evil. It is impossible to hold out against the hatred of these men; their power is absolute over any prisoner who displeases them, and they can make his life a torment far worse than death. The man who repents and endeavors to behave well is their common enemy; above all, they suspect him of informing; and an informer is put to death, often on mere suspicion. Every hall and community of eight hundred convicts has its tribunal, in which are judged the crimes committed against that society. Not to obey the usages is criminal, and a man is liable to punishment. For instance, every man must co-operate in escapes; every convict has his time assigned him to escape, and all his fellow-convicts must protect and aid him. To reveal what a comrade is doing with a view to escape is criminal. I will not speak to you of the horrible customs and morals of the galleys. No man belongs to himself; the government, in order to neutralize the attempts at revolt or escape, takes pains to chain two contrary natures and interests together; and this makes the torture of the coupling unendurable; men are linked together who hate or distrust each other."

"How was it with you?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Ah! there," replied Farrabesche, "I had luck; I

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never drew a lot to kill a convict; I never had to vote the death of any one of them; I never was punished; no man took a dislike to me; and I got on well with the three different men I was chained to; they all feared me but liked me. One reason was, my name was known and famous at the galleys before I got there. A *chauffeur!* they thought me one of those brigands. I have seen *chauffing,*" continued Farrabesche after a pause, in a low voice, "but I never either did it myself, or took any of the money obtained by it. I was a refractory, I evaded the conscription, that was all. I helped my comrades, I kept watch; I was sentinel and brought up the rear-guard; but I never shed any man's blood except in self-defence. Ah! I told all to Monsieur Bonnet and my lawyer, and the judges knew well enough that I was no murderer. But, all the same, I am a great criminal; nothing that I ever did was morally right. However, before I got there, as I was saying, two of my comrades told of me as a man able to do great things. At the galleys, madame, nothing is so valuable as that reputation, not even money. In that republic of misery murder is a passport to tranquillity. I did nothing to destroy that opinion of me. I was sad, resigned, and they mistook the appearance of it. My gloomy manner, my silence, passed for ferocity. All that world, convicts, keepers, young and old, respected me. I was treated as first in my hall. No one interfered with my sleep; I was never suspected of informing; I behaved honorably according to their ideas; I never refused to do service; I never testified the slightest repugnance; I howled with the wolves outside, I prayed to God within. My



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last companion in chains was a soldier, twenty-two years of age, who had committed a theft and deserted in consequence of it. We were chained together for four years, and we were friends; wherever I may be I am certain to meet him when his time is up. This poor devil, whose name is Guépin, is not a scoundrel, he is merely heedless; his punishment may reform him. If my comrades had discovered that religion led me to submit to my trials, — that I meant, when my time was up, to live humbly in a corner, letting no one know where I was, intending to forget their horrible community and never to cross the path of any of them, — they would probably have driven me mad."

"Then," said Madame Graslin, "if a poor young man, a tender soul, carried away by passion, having committed a murder, was spared from death and sent to the galleys — "

"Oh! madame," said Farrabesche, interrupting her, "there is no sparing in that. The sentence may be commuted to twenty years at the galleys, but for a decent young man, that is awful! I could not speak to you of the life that awaits him there; a thousand times better die. Yes, to die upon the scaffold is happiness in comparison."

"I dared not think it," murmured Madame Graslin.

She had turned as white as wax. To hide her face she laid her forehead on the balustrade, and kept it there several minutes. Farrabesche did not know whether he ought to go or remain.

Madame Graslin raised her head at last, looked at Farrabesche with an almost majestic air, and said, to his amazement, in a voice that stirred his heart: —

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"Thank you, my friend. But," she added, after a pause, "where did you find courage to live and suffer?"

"Ah! madame, Monsieur Bonnet put a treasure within my soul! and for that I love him better than all else on earth."

"Better than Catherine?" said Madame Graslin, smiling with a sort of bitterness.

"Almost as well, madame."

"How did he do it?"

"Madame, the words and the voice of that man conquered me. Catherine brought him to that hole in the ground I showed you on the common; he had come fearlessly alone. He was, he said, the new rector of Montégnac; I was his parishioner, he loved me; he knew I was only misguided, not lost; he did not intend to betray me, but to save me; in short, he said many such things that stirred my soul to its depths. That man, madame, commands you to do right with as much force as those who tell you to do wrong. It was he who told me, poor dear man, that Catherine was a mother, and that I was dooming two beings to shame and desertion. 'Well,' I said to him, 'they are like me; I have no future.' He answered that I had a future, two bad futures, before me — one in another world, one in this world — if I persisted in not changing my way of life. In this world, I should die on the scaffold. If I were captured my defence would be impossible. On the contrary, if I took advantage of the leniency of the new government toward all crimes traceable to the conscription, if I delivered myself up, he believed he could save my life; he would engage a

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good lawyer, who would get me off with ten years at the galleys. Then Monsieur Bonnet talked to me of the other life. Catherine wept like the Magdalen — See, madame," said Farrabesche, holding out his right arm, "her face was in that hand, and I felt it wet with tears. She implored me to live. Monsieur Bonnet promised to secure me, when I had served my sentence, a peaceful life here with my child, and to protect me against affront. He catechised me as he would a little child. After three such visits at night he made me as supple as a glove. Would you like to know how, madame?"

Farrabesche and Madame Graslin looked at each other, not explaining to themselves their mutual curiosity.

"Well," resumed the poor liberated convict, "when he left me the first time, and Catherine had gone with him to show the way, I was left alone. I then felt within my soul a freshness, a calmness, a sweetness, I had never known since childhood. It was like the happiness my poor Catherine had given me. The love of this dear man had come to *seek me;* that, and his thought for me, for my future, stirred my soul to its depths; it changed me. A light broke forth in my being. As long as he was there, speaking to me, I resisted. That's not surprising; he was a priest, and we bandits don't eat of their bread. But when I no longer heard his footsteps nor Catherine's, oh! I was — as he told me two days later — enlightened by divine grace; God gave me thenceforth strength to bear all, — prison, sentence, irons, parting; even the life of the galleys. I believed in his word as I do in

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the Gospel; I looked upon my sufferings as a debt I was bound to pay. When I seemed to suffer too much, I looked across ten years and saw my home in the woods, my little Benjamin, my Catherine. He kept his word, that good Monsieur Bonnet. But one thing was lacking. When at last I was released, Catherine was not at the gate of the galleys; she was not on the common. No doubt she has died of grief. That is why I am always sad. Now, thanks to you, I shall have useful work to do; I can employ both body and soul, — and my boy, too, for whom I live."

"I begin to understand how it is that the rector has changed the character of this whole community," said Madame Graslin.

"Nothing can resist him," said Farrabesche.

"Yes, yes, I know it!" replied Véronique, hastily, making a gesture of farewell to her keeper.

Farrabesche withdrew. Véronique remained alone on the terrace for a good part of the day, walking up and down in spite of a fine rain which fell till evening. When her face was thus convulsed, neither her mother nor Aline dared to interrupt her. She did not notice in the dusk that her mother was talking in the salon to Monsieur Bonnet; the old woman, anxious to put an end to this fresh attack of dreadful depression, sent little Francis to fetch her. The child took his mother's hand and led her in. When she saw the rector she gave a start of surprise in which there seemed to be some fear. Monsieur Bonnet took her back to the terrace, saying:—

"Well, madame, what were you talking about with Farrabesche?"

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In order not to speak falsely, Véronique evaded a reply; she questioned Monsieur Bonnet.

"That man was your first victory here, was he not?" she said.

"Yes," he answered; "his conversion would, I thought, give me all Montégnac — and I was not mistaken."

Véronique pressed Monsieur Bonnet's hand and said, with tears in her voice, "I am your penitent from this day forth, monsieur; I shall go to-morrow to the confessional."

Her last words showed a great internal effort, a terrible victory won over herself. The rector brought her back to the house without saying another word. After that he remained till dinner-time, talking about the proposed improvements at Montégnac.

"Agriculture is a question of time," he said; "the little that I know of it makes me understand what a gain it would be to get some good out of the winter. The rains are now beginning, and the mountains will soon be covered with snow; your operations cannot then be begun. Had you not better hasten Monsieur Grossetête?"

Insensibly, Monsieur Bonnet, who at first did all the talking, led Madame Graslin to join in the conversation and so distract her thoughts; in fact, he left her almost recovered from the emotions of the day. Madame Sauviat, however, thought her daughter too violently agitated to be left alone, and she spent the night in her room.

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## XVI.

CONCERNS ONE OF THE BLUNDERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

THE following day an express, sent from Limoges by Monsieur Grossetête to Madame Graslin, brought her the following letter: —

*To Madame Graslin:*

MY DEAR CHILD, — It was difficult to find horses, but I hope you are satisfied with those I sent you. If you want work or draft horses, you must look elsewhere. In any case, however, I advise you to do your tilling and transportation with oxen. All the countries where agriculture is carried on with horses lose capital when the horse is past work; whereas cattle always return a profit to those who use them.

I approve in every way of your enterprise, my child; you will thus employ the passionate activity of your soul, which was turning against yourself and thus injuring you.

Your second request, namely, for a man capable of understanding and seconding your projects, requires me to find you a *rara avis* such as we seldom raise in the provinces, where, if we do raise them, we never keep them. The education of that high product is too slow and too risky a speculation for country folks.

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Besides, men of intellect alarm us; we call them "originals." The men belonging to the scientific category from which you will have to obtain your co-operator do not flourish here, and I was on the point of writing to you that I despaired of fulfilling your commission. You want a poet, a man of ideas, — in short, what we should here call a fool, and all our fools go to Paris. I have spoken of your plans to the young men employed in land surveying, to contractors on the canals, and makers of the embankments, and none of them see any "advantage" in what you propose.

But suddenly, as good luck would have it, chance has thrown in my way the very man you want; a young man to whom I believe I render a service in naming him to you. You will see by his letter, herewith inclosed, that deeds of beneficence ought not to be done hap-hazard. Nothing needs more reflection than a good action. We never know whether that which seems best at one moment may not prove an evil later. The exercise of beneficence, as I have lived to discover, is to usurp the rôle of Destiny.

As she read that sentence Madame Graslin let fall the letter and was thoughtful for several minutes.

"My God!" she said at last, "when wilt thou cease to strike me down on all sides?"

Then she took up the letter and continued reading it:

Gérard seems to me to have a cool head and an ardent heart; that's the sort of man you want. Paris is just now a hotbed of new doctrines; I should be delighted to have the lad removed from the traps which ambitious minds are setting for the generous youth of

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France. While I do not altogether approve of the narrow and stupefying life of the provinces, neither do I like the passionate life of Paris, with its ardor of reformation, which is driving youth into so many unknown ways. You alone know my opinions; to my mind the moral world revolves upon its own axis, like the material world. My poor protégé demands (as you will see from his letter) things impossible. No power can resist ambitions so violent, so imperious, so absolute, as those of to-day. I am in favor of low levels and slowness in political change; I dislike these social overturns to which ambitious minds subject us.

To you I confide these principles of a monarchical and prejudiced old man, because you are discreet. Here I hold my tongue in the midst of worthy people, who the more they fail the more they believe in progress; but I suffer deeply at the irreparable evils already inflicted on our dear country.

I have replied to the inclosed letter, telling my young man that a worthy task awaits him. He will go to see you, and though his letter will enable you to judge of him, you had better study him still further before committing yourself, — though you women understand many things from the mere look of a man. However, all the men whom you employ, even the most insignificant, ought to be thoroughly satisfactory to you. If you don't like him don't take him; but if he suits you, my dear child, I beg you to cure him of his ill-disguised ambition. Make him take to a peaceful, happy, rural life, where true beneficence is perpetually exercised; where the capacities of great and strong souls find continual exercise, and they themselves discover daily

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fresh sources of admiration in the works of Nature, and in real ameliorations, real progress, an occupation worthy of any man.

I am not oblivious of the fact that great ideas give birth to great actions; but as those ideas are necessarily few and far between, I think it may be said that usually things are more useful than ideas. He who fertilizes a corner of the earth, who brings to perfection a fruit-tree, who makes a turf on a thankless soil, is far more useful in his generation than he who seeks new theories for humanity. How, I ask you, has Newton's science changed the condition of the country districts? Oh! my dear, I always loved you; but to-day I, who fully understand what you are about to attempt, I adore you.

No one at Limoges forgets you; we all admire your grand resolution to benefit Montégnac. Be a little grateful to us for having soul enough to admire a noble action, and do not forget that the first of your admirers is also your first friend.

F. Grossetête.

The inclosed letter was as follows: —

*To Monsieur Grossetête:*

Monsieur, — You have been to me a father when you might have been only a mere protector, and therefore I venture to make you a rather sad confidence. It is to you alone, you who have made me what I am, that I can tell my troubles.

I am afflicted with a terrible malady, a cruel moral malady. In my soul are feelings and in my mind convictions which make me utterly unfit for what the State

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and society demand of me. This may seem to you ingratitude; it is only the statement of a condition. When I was twelve years old you, my generous godfather, saw in me, the son of a mere workman, an aptitude for the exact sciences and a precocious desire to rise in life. You favored my impulse toward better things when my natural fate was to stay a carpenter like my father, who, poor man, did not live long enough to enjoy my advancement. Indeed, monsieur, you did a good thing, and there is never a day that I do not bless you for it. It may be that I am now to blame; but whether I am right or wrong it is very certain that I suffer. In making my complaint to you I feel that I take you as my judge like God himself. Will you listen to my story and grant me your indulgence?

Between sixteen and eighteen years of age I gave myself to the study of the exact sciences with an ardor, you remember, that made me ill. My future depended on my admission to the École Polytechnique. At that time my studies overworked my brain, and I came near dying; I studied night and day; I did more than the nature of my organs permitted. I wanted to pass such satisfying examinations that my place in the École would be not only secure, but sufficiently advanced to release me from the cost of my support, which I did not want you to pay any longer.

I triumphed! I tremble to-day as I think of the frightful conscription (if I may so call it) of brains delivered over yearly to the State by family ambition. By insisting on these severe studies at the moment when a youth attains his various forms of growth, the

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authorities produce secret evils and kill by midnight study many precious faculties which later would have developed both strength and grandeur. The laws of nature are relentless; they do not yield in any particular to the enterprises or the wishes of society. In the moral order as in the natural order all abuses must be paid for; fruits forced in a hot-house are produced at the tree's expense and often at the sacrifice of the goodness of its product. La Quintinie killed the orange-trees to give Louis XIV. a bunch of their flowers every day at all seasons. So it is with intellects. The strain upon adolescent brains discounts their future.

That which is chiefly wanting to our epoch is legislative genius. Europe has had no true legislators since Jesus Christ, who, not having given to the world a political code, left his work incomplete. Before establishing great schools of specialists and regulating the method of recruiting for them, where were the great thinkers who could bear in mind the relation of such institutions to human powers, balancing advantages and injuries, and studying the past for the laws of the future? What inquiry has been made as to the condition of exceptional men, who, by some fatal chance, knew human sciences before their time? Has the rarity of such cases been reckoned — the result examined? Has any inquiry been made as to the means by which such men were enabled to endure the perpetual strain of thought? How many, like Pascal, died prematurely, worn-out by knowledge? Have statistics been gathered as to the age at which those men who lived the longest began their studies? Who has ever known, does any one now know, the interior construction of brains which

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have been able to sustain a premature burden of human knowledge? Who suspects that this question belongs, above all, to the physiology of man?

For my part, I now believe the true general law is to remain a long time in the vegetative condition of adolescence; and that those exceptions where strength of organs is produced during adolescence result usually in the shortening of life. Thus the man of genius who is able to bear up under the precocious exercise of his faculties is an exception to an exception.

If I am right, if what I say accords with social facts and medical observations, then the system practised in France in her technical schools is a fatal impairment and mutilation (in the style of La Quintinie) practised upon the noblest flower of youth in each generation.

But it is better to continue my history, and add my doubts as the facts develop themselves.

When I entered the École Polytechnique, I worked harder than ever and with even more ardor, in order to leave it as triumphantly as I had entered it. From nineteen to twenty-one I developed every aptitude and strengthened every faculty by constant practice. Those two years were the crown and completion of the first three, during which I had only prepared myself to do well. Therefore my pride was great when I won the right to choose the career that pleased me most, — either military or naval engineering, artillery, or staff duty, or the civil engineering of mining, and *ponts et chaussées.*[1] By your advice, I chose the latter.

But where I triumphed how many others fail! Do

[1] Department of the government including everything connected with the making and repairing of roads, bridges, canals, etc.

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you know that from year to year the State increases the scientific requirements of the École? the studies are more severe, more exacting yearly. The preparatory studies which tried me so much were nothing to the intense work of the school itself, which has for its object to put the whole of physical science, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and all their nomenclatures into the minds of young men of nineteen to twenty-one years of age. The State, which seems in France to wish to substitute itself in many ways for the paternal authority, has neither bowels of compassion nor fatherhood; it makes its experiments *in anima vili*. Never does it inquire into the horrible statistics of the suffering it causes. Does it know the number of brain fevers among its pupils during the last thirty-six years; or the despair and the moral destruction which decimate its youth? I am pointing out to you this painful side of the State education, for it is one of the anterior contingents of the actual result.

You know that scholars whose conceptions are slow, or who are temporarily disabled from excess of mental work, are allowed to remain at the École three years instead of two; they then become the object of suspicions little favorable to their capacity. This often compels young men, who might later show superior capacity, to leave the school without being employed, simply because they could not meet the final examination with the full scientific knowledge required. They are called "dried fruits;" Napoleon made sub-lieutenants of them. To-day the "dried fruits" constitute an enormous loss of capital to families and of time to individuals.

However, as I say, I triumphed. At twenty-one

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years of age I knew the mathematical sciences up to the point to which so many men of genius have brought them, and I was impatient to distinguish myself by carrying them further. This desire is so natural that almost every pupil leaving the École fixes his eyes on that moral sun called Fame. The first thought of all is to become another Newton, or Laplace, or Vauban. Such are the efforts that France demands of the young men who leave her celebrated school.

Now let us see the fate of these men culled with so much care from each generation. At one-and-twenty we dream of life, and expect marvels of it. I entered the École des Ponts et Chaussées; I was a pupil-engineer. I studied the science of construction, and how ardently! I am sure you remember that. I left the school in 1827, being then twenty-four years of age, still only a candidate as engineer, and the government paid me one hundred and fifty francs a month; the commonest book-keeper in Paris earns that by the time he is eighteen, giving little more than four hours a day to his work.

By a most unusual piece of luck, perhaps because of the distinction my devoted studies won for me, I was made, in 1828, when I was twenty-five years old, engineer-in-ordinary. I was sent, as you know, to a sub-prefecture, with a salary of twenty-five hundred francs. The question of money is nothing. Certainly my fate has been more brilliant than the son of a carpenter might expect; but where will you find a grocer's boy, who, if thrown into a shop at sixteen, will not in ten years be on the high-road to an independent property?

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I learned then to what these terrible efforts of mental power, these gigantic exertions demanded by the State were to lead. The State now employed me to count and measure pavements and heaps of stones on the roadways; I had to keep in order, repair, and sometimes construct culverts, one-arched bridges, regulate drift-ways, clean and sometimes open ditches, lay out bounds, and answer questions about the planting and felling of trees. Such are the principal and sometimes the only occupations of ordinary engineers, together with a little levelling which the government obliges us to do ourselves, though any of our chain-bearers with their limited experience can do it better than we with all our science.

There are nearly four hundred engineers-in-ordinary and pupil engineers; and as there are not more than a hundred or so of engineers-in-chief, only a limited number of the sub-engineers can hope to rise. Besides, above the grade of engineer-in-chief, there is no absorbent class; for we cannot count as means of absorption the ten or fifteen places of inspector-generals or divisionaries, — posts that are almost as useless in our corps as colonels are in the artillery, where the battery is the essential thing. The engineer-in-ordinary, like the captain of artillery, knows the whole science. He ought not to have any one over him except an administrative head to whom no more than eighty-six engineers should report, — for one engineer, with two assistants is enough for a department.

The present hierarchy in these bodies results in the subordination of active energetic capacities to the worn-out capacities of old men, who, thinking they know

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best, alter or nullify the plans submitted by their subordinates, — perhaps with the sole aim of making their existence felt; for that seems to me the only influence exercised over the public works of France by the Council-general of the *Ponts et Chaussées.*

Suppose, however, that I become, between thirty and forty years of age, an engineer of the first-class and an engineer-in-chief before I am fifty. Alas! I see my future; it is written before my eyes. Here is a forecast of it: —

My present engineer-in-chief is sixty years old; he issued with honors, as I did, from the famous École; he has turned gray doing in two departments what I am doing now, and he has become the most ordinary man it is possible to imagine; he has fallen from the height to which he had really risen; far worse, he is no longer on the level of scientific knowledge; science has progressed, he has stayed where he was. The man who came forth ready for life at twenty-two years of age, with every sign of superiority, has nothing left to-day but the reputation of it. In the beginning, with his mind specially turned to the exact sciences and mathematics by his education, he neglected everything that was not his specialty; and you can hardly imagine his present dulness in all other branches of human knowledge. I hardly dare confide even to you the secrets of his incapacity sheltered by the fact that he was educated at the École Polytechnique. With that label attached to him and on the faith of that prestige, no one dreams of doubting his ability. To you alone do I dare reveal the fact that the dulling of all his talents has led him to spend a million on a single



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matter which ought not to have cost the administration more than two hundred thousand francs. I wished to protest, and was about to inform the prefect; but an engineer I know very well reminded me of one of our comrades who was hated by the administration for doing that very thing. "How would you like," he said to me, "when you get to be engineer-in-chief to have your errors dragged forth by your subordinate? Before long your engineer-in-chief will be made a divisional inspector. As soon as any one of us commits a serious blunder, as he has done, the administration (which can't allow itself to appear in the wrong) will quietly retire him from active duty by making him inspector."

That's how the reward of merit devolves on incapacity. All France knew of the disaster which happened in the heart of Paris to the first suspension bridge built by an engineer, a member of the Academy of Sciences; a melancholy collapse caused by blunders such as none of the ancient engineers — the man who cut the canal at Briare in Henri IV.'s time, or the monk who built the Pont Royal — would have made; but our administration consoled its engineer for his blunder by making him a member of the Council-general.

Are the technical schools vast manufactories of incapables? That subject requires careful investigation. If I am right they need reforming, at any rate in their method of proceeding, — for I am not, of course, doubting the utility of such schools. Only, when we look back into the past we see that France in former days never wanted for the great talents necessary to the State; but now she prefers to hatch out talent geometrically, after the theory of Monge. Did Vauban

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ever go to any other École than that great school we call Vocation? Who was Riquet's tutor? When great geniuses arise above the social mass, impelled by vocation, they are nearly always rounded into completeness; the man is then not merely a specialist, he has the gift of universality. Do you think that an engineer from the École Polytechnique could ever create one of those miracles of architecture such as Leonardo da Vinci knew how to build, — mechanician, architect, painter, inventor of hydraulics, indefatigable constructor of canals that he was?

Trained from their earliest years to the baldness of axiom and formula, the youths who leave the École have lost the sense of elegance and ornament; a column seems to them useless; they return to the point where art begins, and cling to the useful.

But all this is nothing in comparison to the real malady which is undermining me. I feel an awful transformation going on within me; I am conscious that my powers and my faculties, formerly unnaturally taxed, are giving way. I am letting the prosaic influence of my life get hold of me. I who, by the very nature of my efforts, looked to do some great thing, I am face to face with none but petty ones; I measure stones, I inspect roads, I have not enough to really occupy me for two hours in my day. I see my colleagues marry, and fall into a situation contrary to the spirit of modern society. I wanted to be useful to my country. Is my ambition an unreasonable one? The country asked me to put forth all my powers; it told me to become a representative of science; yet here I am with folded arms in the depths of the provinces. I am

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not even allowed to leave the locality in which I am penned, to exercise my faculties in planning useful enterprises. A hidden but very real disfavor is the certain reward of any one of us who yields to an inspiration and goes beyond the special service laid down for him.

No, the favor a superior man has to hope for in that case is that his talent and his presumption may not be noticed, and that his project may be buried in the archives of the administration. What think you will be the reward of Vicat, the one among us who has brought about the only real progress in the practical science of construction? The Council-general of the *Ponts et Chaussées*, composed in part of men worn-out by long and sometimes honorable service, but whose only remaining force is for negation, and who set aside everything they no longer comprehend, is the extinguisher used to snuff out the projects of audacious spirits. This Council seems to have been created to paralyze the arm of that glorious youth of France, which asks only to work and to be useful to its country.

Monstrous things are done in Paris. The future of a province depends on the mere signature of men who (through intrigues I have no time to explain to you) often stop the execution of useful and much-needed work; in fact, the best plans are often those which offer most to the cupidity of commercial companies or speculators.

Another five years and I shall no longer be myself; my ambition will be quenched, my desire to use the faculties my country ordered me to exercise gone forever; the faculties themselves are rusting out in the miserable corner of the world in which I vegetate. Tak-

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ing my chances at their best, the future seems to me a poor thing. I have just taken advantage of a furlough to come to Paris; I mean to change my profession and find some other way to put my energy, my knowledge, and my activity to use. I shall send in my resignation and go to some other country, where men of my special capacity are wanted.

If I find I cannot do this, then I shall throw myself into the struggle of the new doctrines, which certainly seem calculated to produce great changes in the present social order by judiciously guiding the working-classes. What are we now but workers without work, tools on the shelves of a shop? We are trained and organized as if to move the world, and nothing is given us to do. I feel within me some great thing, which is decreasing daily, and will soon vanish; I tell you so with mathematical frankness. Before making the change I want your advice; I look upon myself as your child, and I will never take any important step without consulting you, for your experience is equal to your kindness.

I know very well that the State, after obtaining a class of trained men, cannot undertake for them alone great public works; there are not three hundred bridges needed a year in all France; the State can no more build great buildings for the fame of its engineers than it can declare war merely to win battles and bring to the front great generals; but, then, as men of genius have never failed to present themselves when the occasion called for them, springing from the crowd like Vauban, can there be any greater proof of the uselessness of the present institution? Can't they see that when they have stimulated a man of talent by all

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these preparations he will make a fierce struggle before he allows himself to become a nonentity? Is this good policy on the part of the State? On the contrary, is not the State lighting the fire of ardent ambitions, which must find fuel somewhere.

Among the six hundred young men whom they put forth every year there are exceptions, — men who resist what may be called their demonetization. I know some myself, and if I could tell you their struggles with men and things when armed with useful projects and conceptions which might bring life and prosperity to the half-dead provinces where the State has sent them, you would feel that a man of power, a man of talent, a man whose nature is a miracle, is a hundredfold more unfortunate and more to be pitied than the man whose lower nature lets him submit to the shrinkage of his faculties.

I have made up my mind, therefore, that I would rather direct some commercial or industrial enterprise, and live on small means while trying to solve some of the great problems still unknown to industry and to society, than remain at my present post.

You will tell me, perhaps, that nothing hinders me from employing the leisure that I certainly have in using my intellectual powers and seeking in the stillness of this commonplace life the solution of some problem useful to humanity. Ah! monsieur, don't you know the influence of the provinces, — the relaxing effect of a life just busy enough to waste time on futile labor, and not enough to use the rich resources our education has given us? Don't think me, my dear protector, eaten up by the desire to make a fortune,

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nor even by an insensate desire for fame. I am too much of a calculator not to know the nothingness of glory. Neither do I want to marry; seeing the fate now before me, I think my existence a melancholy gift to offer any woman. As for money, though I regard it as one of the most powerful means given to social man to act with, it is, after all, but a means.

I place my whole desire and happiness on the hope of being useful to my country. My greatest pleasure would be to work in some situation suited to my faculties. If in your region, or in the circle of your acquaintances, you should hear of any enterprise that needed the capacities you know me to possess, think of me; I will wait six months for your answer before taking any step.

What I have written here, dear sir and friend, others think. I have seen many of my classmates or older graduates caught like me in the toils of some specialty, — geographical engineers, captain-professors, captains of engineers, who will remain captains all their lives, and now bitterly regret they did not enter active service with the army. Reflecting on these miserable results, I ask myself the following questions, and I would like your opinion on them, knowing you to be a man capable of maturely meditating on them, assuring you that they are the fruit of long meditation, clarified in the fires of suffering: —

What is the real object of the State? Does it truly seek to obtain fine capacities? The system now pursued directly defeats that end; it has created the most thorough mediocrities that any government hostile to superiority could desire. Does it wish to give a career

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to its choice minds? As a matter of fact, it affords them the meanest opportunities; there is not a man who has issued from the Écoles who does not bitterly regret, when he gets to be fifty or sixty years of age, that he ever fell into the trap set for him by the promises of the State. Does it seek to obtain men of genius? What man of genius, what great talent have the schools produced since 1790? If it had not been for Napoleon would Cachin, the man of genius to whom France owes Cherbourg, have existed? Imperial despotism brought him forward; the constitutional régime would have smothered him. How many men from the Écoles are to be found in the Academy of Sciences? Possibly two or three. The man of genius develops always outside of the technical schools. In the sciences which those schools teach genius obeys only its own laws; it will not develop except under conditions which man cannot control; neither the State nor the science of mankind, anthropology, understands them. Riquet, Perronet, Leonardo da Vinci, Cachin, Palladio, Brunelleschi, Michel-Angelo, Bramante, Vauban, Vicat, derive their genius from causes unobserved and preparatory, which we call chance, — the pet word of fools. Never, with or without schools, are mighty workmen such as these wanting to their epoch.

Now comes the question, Does the State gain through these institutions the better doing of its works of public utility, or the cheaper doing of them? As for that, I answer that private enterprises of a like kind get on very well without the help of our engineers; and next, the government works are the most extravagant in the world, and the additional cost of the vast administra-

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tive staff of the *Ponts et Chaussées* is immense. In all other countries, in Germany, England, Italy, where institutions like ours do not exist, works of this character are better done and far less costly than in France. Those three nations are remarkable for new and useful inventions in this line. I know it is the fashion to say, in speaking of our Écoles, that all Europe envies them; but for the last fifteen years Europe, which closely observes us, has not established others like them. England, that clever calculator, has better schools among her working population, from which come practical men who show their genius the moment they rise from practice to theory. Stephenson and MacAdam did not come from schools like ours.

But what is the good of talking? When a few young and able engineers, full of ardor, solve, at the outset of their career, the problem of maintaining the roads of France, which need some hundred millions spent upon them every quarter of a century (and which are now in a pitiable state), they gain nothing by making known in reports and memoranda their intelligent knowledge; it is immediately engulfed in the archives of the general Direction, — that Parisian centre where everything enters and nothing issues; where old men are jealous of young ones, and all the posts of management are used to shelve old officers or men who have blundered.

This is why, with a body of scientific men spread all over the face of France and constituting a part of the administration, — a body which ought to enlighten every region on the subject of its resources, — this is why we are still discussing the practicability of railroads while other countries are making theirs. If ever France was

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to show the excellence of her institution of technical schools, it should have been in this magnificent phase of public works, which is destined to change the face of States and nations, to double human life, and modify the laws of space and time. Belgium, the United States of America, England, none of whom have an École Polytechnique, will be honeycombed with railroads when French engineers are still surveying ours, and selfish interests, hidden behind all projects, are hindering their execution.

Thus I say that as for the State, it derives no benefit from its technical schools; as for the individual pupil of those schools, his earnings are poor, his ambition crushed, and his life a cruel deception. Most assuredly the powers he has displayed between sixteen and twenty-six years of age would, if he had been cast upon his own resources, have brought him more fame and more wealth than the government in whom he trusted will ever give him. As a commercial man, a learned man, a military man, this choice intellect would have worked in a vast centre where his precious faculties and his ardent ambition would not be idiotically and prematurely repressed.

Where, then, is progress? Man and State are both kept backward by this system. Does not the experience of a whole generation demand a reform in the practical working of these institutions? The duty of culling from all France during each generation the choice minds destined to become the learned and the scientific of the nation is a sacred office, the priests of which, the arbiters of so many fates, should be trained by special study. Mathematical knowledge is perhaps

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less necessary to them than physiological knowledge. And do you not think that they need a little of that second-sight which is the witchcraft of great men? As it is, the examiners are former professors, honorable men grown old in harness, who limit their work to selecting the best themes. They are unable to do what is really demanded of them; and yet their functions are the noblest in the State and demand extraordinary men.

Do not think, dear sir and friend, that I blame only the École itself; no, I blame the system by which it is recruited. This system is the *concours*, competition, —a modern invention, essentially bad; bad not only in science, but wherever it is employed, in arts, in all selections of men, of projects, of things. If it is a reproach to our great Écoles that they have not produced men superior to other educational establishments, it is still more shameful that the *grand prix* of the Institute has not as yet furnished a single great painter, great musician, great architect, great sculptor; just as the suffrage for the last twenty years has not elected out of its tide of mediocrities a single great statesman. My observation makes me detect, as I think, an error which vitiates in France both education and politics. It is a cruel error, and it rests on the following principle, which organizers have misconceived: —

*Nothing, either in experience or in the nature of things, can give a certainty that the intellectual qualities of the adult youth will be those of the mature man.*

At this moment I am intimate with a number of distinguished men who concern themselves with all the moral maladies which are now afflicting France. They

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see, as I do, that our highest education is manufacturing temporary capacities, — temporary because they are without exercise and without future; that such education is without profit to the State because it is devoid of the vigor of belief and feeling. Our whole system of public education needs overhauling, and the work should be presided over by some man of great knowledge, powerful will, and gifted with that legislative genius which has never been met with among moderns, except perhaps in Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Possibly our superfluous numbers might be employed in giving elementary instruction so much needed by the people. The deplorable amount of crime and misdemeanors shows a social disease directly arising from the half-education given the masses, which tends to the destruction of social ties by making the people reflect just enough to desert the religious beliefs which are favorable to social order, and not enough to lift them to the theory of obedience and duty, which is the highest reach of the new transcendental philosophy. But as it is impossible to make a whole nation study Kant, therefore I say fixed beliefs and habits are safer for the masses than shallow studies and reasoning.

If I had my life to begin over again, perhaps I would enter a seminary and become a simple village priest, or the teacher of a country district. But I am too far advanced in my profession now to be a mere primary instructor; I can, if I leave my present post, act in a wider range than that of a school or a country parish. The Saint-Simonians, to whom I have been tempted to ally myself, want now to take a course in which I cannot follow them. Nevertheless, in spite of their

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mistakes, they have touched on many of the sore spots which are the fruits of our present legislation, and which the State will only doctor by insufficient palliatives, — merely delaying in France the moral and political crisis that must come.

Adieu, dear Monsieur Grossetête; accept the assurance of my respectful attachment, which, notwithstanding all these observations, can only increase.

GRÉGOIRE GÉRARD.

According to his old habit as a banker, Grossetête had jotted down his reply on the back of the letter itself, heading it with the sacramental word, *Answered.*

It is useless, my dear Gérard, to discuss the observations made in your letter, because by a trick of chance (I use the term which is, as you say, the pet word of fools) I have a proposal to make to you which may result in withdrawing you from the situation you find so bad. Madame Graslin, the owner of the forests of Montégnac and of a barren plateau extending from the base of a chain of mountains on which are the forests, wishes to improve this vast domain, to clear her timber properly, and cultivate the stony plain.

To put this project into execution she needs a man of your scientific knowledge and ardor, and one who has also your disinterested devotion and your ideas of practical utility. It will be little money and much work! a great result from small means! a whole region to be changed fundamentally! barren places to be made to gush with plenty! Is n't that precisely what you want, — you who are dreaming of constructing a

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poem? From the tone of sincerity which pervades your letter, I do not hesitate to bid you come and see me at Limoges. But, my good friend, don't send in your resignation yet; get leave of absence only, and tell your administration that you are going to study questions connected with your profession outside of the government works. In this way, you will not lose your rights, and you will have time to judge for yourself whether the project conceived by the rector of Montégnac and approved by Madame Graslin is feasible.

I will explain to you by word of mouth the advantages you will find in case this great scheme can be carried out. Rely on the friendship of

Yours, etc., T. Grossetête.

Madame Graslin replied to Grossetête in few words: "Thank you, my friend; I shall expect your *protégé*." She showed the letter to the rector, saying, —

"One more wounded man for the hospital."

The rector read the letter, reread it, made two or three turns on the terrace silently; then he gave it back to Madame Graslin, saying, —

"A fine soul, and a superior man. He says the schools invented by the genius of the Revolution manufacture incapacities. For my part, I say they manufacture unbelievers; for if Monsieur Gérard is not an atheist, he is a protestant."

"We will ask him," she said, struck by the answer.

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## XVII.

### THE REVOLUTION OF JULY JUDGED AT MONTÉGNAC.

A FORTNIGHT later, in December, and in spite of the cold, Monsieur Grossetête came to the château de Montégnac, to "present his *protégé*," whom Véronique and Monsieur Bonnet were impatiently awaiting.

"I must love you very much, my dear child," said the old man, taking Véronique's two hands in his, and kissing them with that gallantry of old men which never displeases women, "yes, I must love you well, to come from Limoges in such weather. But I wanted to present to you myself the gift of Monsieur Grégoire Gérard here present. You'll find him a man after your own heart, Monsieur Bonnet," added the banker, bowing affectionately to the rector.

Gérard's external appearance was not prepossessing. He was of middle height, stocky in shape, the neck sunk in the shoulders, as they say vulgarly; he had yellow hair, and the pink eyes of an albino, with lashes and eyebrows almost white. Though his skin, like that of all persons of that description, was dazzlingly white, marks of the small pox and other very visible scars had destroyed its original brilliancy. Study had probably injured his sight, for he wore glasses.

When he removed the great cloak of a gendarme in which he was wrapped, it was seen that his clothing

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did not improve his general appearance. The manner in which his garments were put on and buttoned, his untidy cravat, his rumpled shirt, were signs of the want of personal care with which men of science, all more or less absent-minded, are charged. As in the case of most thinkers, his countenance and his attitude, the development of his bust and the thinness of his legs, betrayed a sort of bodily debility produced by habits of meditation. Nevertheless, the ardor of his heart and the vigor of his mind, proofs of which were given in his letter, gleamed from his forehead, which was white as Carrara marble. Nature seemed to have reserved to herself that spot in order to place there visible signs of the grandeur, constancy, and goodness of the man. The nose, like that of most men of the true Gallic race, was flattened. His mouth, firm and straight, showed absolute discretion and the instinct of economy. But the whole mask, worn by study, looked prematurely old.

"We must begin by thanking you, monsieur," said Madame Graslin, addressing the engineer, "for being willing to direct an enterprise in a part of the country which can offer you no other pleasure than the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing a real good."

"Madame," he replied, "Monsieur Grossetête has told me enough about your enterprise as we came along to make me already glad that I can in any way be useful to you; the prospect of living in close relations with you and Monsieur Bonnet seems to me charming Unless I am dismissed from this region, I expect to end my days here."

"We will try not to let you change your mind,' replied Madame Graslin, smiling.

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"Here," said Grossetête, addressing Véronique, whom he took aside, "are the papers which the *procureur-général* gave to me. He was quite surprised that you did not address your inquiry about Catherine Curieux to him. All that you wished has been done immediately, with the utmost promptitude and devotion. Three months hence Catherine Curieux will be sent to you."

"Where is she?" asked Véronique.

"She is now in the hospital Saint-Louis," replied the old man; "they are awaiting her recovery before sending her from Paris."

"Ah! is the poor girl ill?"

"You will find all necessary information in these papers," said Grossetête, giving Véronique a packet.

Madame Graslin returned to her guests to conduct them into the magnificent dining-room on the ground-floor. She sat at table, but did not herself take part in the dinner; since her arrival at Montégnac she had made it a rule to take her meals alone, and Aline, who knew the reason of this withdrawal, faithfully kept the secret of it till her mistress was in danger of death.

The mayor, the *juge de paix*, and the doctor of Montégnac had been invited.

The doctor, a young man twenty-seven years of age, named Roubaud, was extremely desirous of knowing a woman so celebrated in Limoges. The rector was all the more pleased to present him at the château because he wanted to gather a little society around Véronique to distract her mind and give it food. Roubaud was one of those thoroughly well-trained young physicians whom the École de Médecine in Paris sends forth to



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the profession. He would undoubtedly have shone on the vast stage of the capital; but frightened by the clash of ambitions in Paris, and knowing himself more capable than pushing, more learned than intriguing, his gentle disposition led him to choose the narrow career of the provinces, where he hoped to be sooner appreciated than in Paris.

At Limoges, Roubaud came in contact with the settled practice of the regular physicians and the habits of the people; he therefore let himself be persuaded by Monsieur Bonnet, who, judging by the gentle and winning expression of his face, thought him well-suited to co-operate in his own work at Montégnac. Roubaud was small and fair; his general appearance was rather insipid, but his gray eyes betrayed the depths of the physiologist and the patient tenacity of a studious man. There was no physician in Montégnac except an old army-surgeon, more devoted to his cellar than to his patients, and too old to continue with any vigor the hard life of a country doctor. At the present time he was dying.

Roubaud had been in Montégnac about eighteen months, and was much liked there. But this young pupil of Desplein and the successors of Cabanis did not believe in Catholicism. He lived in a state of profound indifference as to religion, and did not desire to come out of it. The rector was in despair. Not that Roubaud did any wrong; he never spoke against religion, and his duties were excuse enough for his absence from church; besides, he was incapable of trying to undermine the faith of others, and indeed behaved outwardly as the best of Catholics; he simply

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prohibited himself from thinking of a problem which he considered above the range of human thought. When the rector heard him say that pantheism had been the religion of all great minds he set him down as inclining to the doctrine of Pythagoras on reincarnation.

Roubaud, who saw Madame Graslin for the first time, experienced a violent sensation when he met her. Science revealed to him in her expression, her attitude, in the ravages on her face, untold sufferings both moral and physical, a nature of almost superhuman force, great faculties which would support her under the most conflicting trials; he detected all, — even the darkest corners of that nature so carefully hidden. He felt that some evil, some malady, was devouring the heart of that fine creature; for just as the color of a fruit shows the presence of a worm within it, so certain tints in the human face enable physicians to detect a poisoning thought.

From this moment Monsieur Roubaud attached himself so deeply to Madame Graslin that he became afraid of loving her beyond the permitted line of simple friendship. The brow, the bearing, above all, the glance of Véronique's eye had a sort of eloquence that men invariably understand; it said as plainly that she was dead to love as other women say the contrary by a reversal of the same eloquence. The doctor suddenly vowed to her, in his heart, a chivalrous worship.

He exchanged a rapid glance with the rector, who thought to himself, "Here 's the thunderbolt which will convert my poor unbeliever; Madame Graslin will have more eloquence than I."

The mayor, an old countryman, amazed at the

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luxury of this dining-room and surprised to find himself dining with one of the richest men in the department, had put on his best clothes, which rather hampered him, and this increased his mental awkwardness. Moreover, Madame Graslin in her mourning garments seemed to him very imposing; he was therefore mute. After living all his life as a farmer at Saint-Léonard, he had bought the only habitable house in Montégnac and cultivated with his own hands the land belonging to it. Though he knew how to read and write, he would have been incapable of fulfilling his functions were it not for the help of his clerk and the *juge de paix*, who prepared his work for him. He was very anxious to have a notary established in Montégnac, in order that he might shift the burden of his responsibility on to that officer's shoulders. But the poverty of the village and its outlying districts made such a functionary almost useless, and the inhabitants had recourse when necessary to the notaries of the chief town of the arrondissement.

The *juge de paix*, named Clousier, was formerly a lawyer in Limoges, where cases had deserted him because he insisted on putting into practice that fine axiom that the lawyer is the best judge of the client and the case. In 1809 he obtained his present post, the meagre salary of which just enabled him to live. He had now reached a stage of honorable but absolute poverty. After a residence of twenty-one years in this poor village the worthy man, thoroughly countrified, looked, top-coat and all, exactly like the farmers about him.

Under this coarse exterior Clousier hid a clear-

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sighted mind, given to lofty meditation on public policy, though he himself had fallen into a state of complete indifference, derived from his intimate knowledge of men and their interests. This man, who baffled for a long time the rector's perspicacity and who might in a higher sphere have proved another l'Hôpital, incapable of intrigue like all really profound persons, was by this time living in the contemplative state of an ancient hermit. Independent through privation, no personal consideration acted on his mind; he knew the laws and judged impartially. His life, reduced to the merest necessaries, was pure and regular. The peasants loved Monsieur Clousier and respected him for the disinterested fatherly care with which he settled their differences and gave them advice in their daily affairs. The "goodman Clousier" as all Montégnac called him, had a nephew with him as clerk, an intelligent young man, who afterwards contributed much to the prosperity of the district.

Old Clousier's personal appearance was remarkable for a broad, high forehead and two bushes of white hair which stood out from his head on either side of it. His highly colored complexion and well-developed corpulence might have made persons think, in spite of his actual sobriety, that he cultivated Bacchus as well as Troplong and Toullier. His half-extinct voice was the sign of an oppressive asthma. Perhaps the dry air of Montégnac had contributed to fix him there. He lived in a house arranged for him by a well-to-do cobbler to whom it belonged. Clousier had already seen Véronique at church, and he had formed his opinion of her without communicating it to any one, not even to Mon

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sieur Bonnet, with whom he was beginning to be intimate. For the first time in his life the *juge de paix* was to be thrown with persons able to appreciate him.

When the company were seated round a table handsomely appointed (for Véronique had sent all her household belongings from Limoges to Montégnac) the six guests felt a momentary embarrassment. The doctor, the mayor and the *juge de paix* knew nothing of Grossetête and Gérard. But during the first course, old Grossetête's hearty good-humor broke the ice of a first meeting. In addition to this, Madame Graslin's cordiality led on Gérard, and encouraged Roubaud. Under her touch these souls full of fine qualities recognized their relation, and felt they had entered a sympathetic circle. So, by the time the dessert appeared on the table, when the glass and china with gilded edges sparkled, and the choicer wines were served by Aline and Champion and Grossetête's valet, the conversation became sufficiently confidential to allow these four choice minds, thus meeting by chance, to express their real thoughts on matters of importance, such as men like to discuss when they can do so and be sure of the discretion of their companions.

"Your furlough came just in time to let you witness the revolution of July," said Grossetête to Gérard, with an air as if he asked an opinion of him.

"Yes," replied the engineer. "I was in Paris during the three famous days. I saw all; and I came to sad conclusions."

"What were they?" said the rector, eagerly.

"There is no longer any patriotism except under dirty shirts," replied Gérard. "In that lies the ruin

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of France! July was the voluntary defeat of all superiorities, — name, fortune, talent. The ardent, devoted masses carried the day against the rich and the intelligent, to whom ardor and devotion are repugnant."

"To judge by what has happened during the past year," said Monsieur Clousier, "this change of government is simply a premium given to an evil that is sapping us, — individualism. Fifteen years hence all questions of a generous nature will be met by, *What is that to me?* — the great cry of Freedom of Will descending from the religious heights where Luther, Calvin, Zwinglius, and Knox introduced it, into even political economy. *Every one for himself; Every man his own master*, — those two terrible axioms form, with the *What is that to me?* a trinity of wisdom to the burgher and the small land-owner. This egotism results from the vices of our present civil legislation (too hastily made), to which the revolution of July has just given a terrible confirmation."

The *juge de paix* fell back into his usual silence after thus expressing himself; but the topics he suggested must have occupied the minds of those present. Emboldened by Clousier's words, and moved by the look which Gérard exchanged with Grossetête, Monsieur Bonnet ventured to go further.

"The good King Charles X.," he said, "has just failed in the most far-sighted and salutary enterprise a monarch ever planned for the welfare of the people confided to him; and the Church ought to feel proud of the part she took in his councils. But the upper classes deserted him in heart and mind, just as they had already deserted him on the great question of the law of primo-

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geniture, — the lasting honor of the only bold statesman the Restoration has produced, namely, the Comte de Peyronnet. To reconstitute the nation through the family; to take from the press its venomous action and confine it to its real usefulness; to recall the elective Chamber to its true functions; and to restore to religion its power over the people, — such were the four cardinal points of the internal policy of the house of Bourbon. Well, twenty years from now all France will have recognized the necessity of that grand and sound policy. Charles X. was in greater peril in the situation he chose to leave than in that in which his paternal power has been defeated. The future of our noble country — where all things will henceforth be brought periodically into question, where our rulers will discuss incessantly instead of acting, where the press, become a sovereign power, will be the instrument of base ambitions — this future will only prove the wisdom of the king who has just carried away with him the true principles of government; and history will bear in mind the courage with which he resisted his best friends after having probed the wound and seen the necessity of curative measures, which were not sustained by those for whose sake he put himself into the breach."

"Ah! monsieur," cried Gérard, "you are frank; you go straight to your thought without disguise, and I won't contradict you. Napoleon in his Russian campaign was forty years in advance of the spirit of his age; he was never understood. The Russia and England of 1830 explain the campaign of 1812. Charles X. has been misunderstood in the same way. It is quite possible that in twenty-five years from now his ordinances may become the laws of the land."

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"France, too eloquent not to gabble, too full of vanity to bow down before real talent, is, in spite of the sublime good sense of its language and the mass of its people, the very last nation in which two deliberative chambers should have been attempted," said the *juge de paix*. "Or, at any rate, the weaknesses of our national character should have been guarded against by the admirable restrictions which Napoleon's experience laid on them. Our present system may succeed in a country whose action is circumscribed by the nature of its soil, like England; but the law of primogeniture applied to the transmission of land is absolutely necessary; when that law is suppressed the system of legislative representation becomes absurd. England owes her existence to the quasi-feudal law which entails landed property and family mansions on the eldest son. Russia is based on the feudal right of autocracy. Consequently those two nations are to-day on the high-road of startling progress. Austria could only resist our invasions and renew the war against Napoleon by virtue of that law of primogeniture which preserves in the family the active forces of a nation, and supplies the great productions necessary to the State. The house of Bourbon, feeling that it was slipping to the third rank in Europe, by reason of liberalism, wanted to regain its rightful place and there maintain itself, and the nation has thrown it over at the very time it was about to save the nation. I am sure I don't know how low down the present system will drop us."

"If we have a war, France will be without horses, as Napoleon was in 1813, when, being reduced to those

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of France only, he could not profit by his two victories of Lutzen and Botzen, and so was crushed at Leipzig," cried Grossetête. "If peace continues, the evil will only increase. Twenty-five years from now the race of cattle and horses will have diminished in France by one half."

"Monsieur Grossetête is right," remarked Gérard. "So that the work you are undertaking here, madame," he added, addressing Véronique, "is really a service done to the country."

"Yes," said the *juge de paix*, "because Madame has but one son, and the inheritance will not be divided up; but how long will that condition last? For a certain length of time the magnificent culture which you are about to introduce will, let us hope, belong to only one proprietor, who will continue to breed horned beasts and horses; but sooner or later the day must come when these forests and fields will be divided up and sold in small parcels. Divided and redivided, the six thousand acres of that plain will have a thousand or twelve hundred owners, and thenceforth — no more horses and cattle!"

"Oh! as for those days" — began the mayor.

"There! don't you hear the *What is that to me?* Monsieur Clousier talked of?" cried Monsieur Grossetête. "Taken in the act! But, monsieur," resumed the banker, gravely addressing the dumfounded mayor, "those days have really come. In a radius of thirty miles round Paris the land is so divided up into small holdings that milch cows are no longer seen. The Commune of Argenteuil contains thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-five parcels of land, many of

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which do not return a farthing of revenue. If it were not for the rich refuse of Paris, which produces a fodder of strong quality, I don't know how dairymen would get along. As it is, this over-stimulating food and confinement in close stables produce inflammatory diseases, of which the cows often die. They use cows in the neighborhood of Paris as they do horses in the street. Crops more profitable than hay — vegetables, fruit, apple orchards, vineyards — are taking the place of meadow-lands. In a few years we shall see milk sent to Paris by the mail-coaches as they now send fish. What is going on around Paris is also going on round all the large cities of France; the land will thus be used up before many years are gone. Chaptel states that in 1800 there were barely two million acres of vineyard in France; a careful estimate would give ten million to-day. Divided *ad infinitum* by our present system of inheritance, Normandy will lose half her production of horses and cattle; but she will have a monopoly of milk in Paris, for her climate, happily, forbids grape culture. We shall soon see a curious phenomenon in the progressive rise in the cost of meat. In twenty years from now, in 1850, Paris, which paid seven to eleven sous a pound for beef in 1814, will be paying twenty — unless there comes a man of genius who can carry out the plan of Charles X."

"You have laid your finger on the mortal wound of France," said the *juge de paix*. "The root of our evils lies in the section relating to inheritance in the Civil Code, in which the equal division of property among heirs is ordained. That's the pestle that pounds territory into crumbs, individualizes fortunes, and takes

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from them their needful stability; decomposing ever and never recomposing, — a state of things which must end in the ruin of France. The French Revolution emitted a destructive virus to which the July days have given fresh activity. This vitiating element is the accession of the peasantry to the ownership of land. If the section 'On Inheritance' is the principle of the evil, the peasant is the means through which it works. No sooner does that class get a parcel of land into its maw than it begins to subdivide it, till there are scarcely three furrows left in each lot. And even then the peasant does not stop! He divides the three furrows across their length, as Monsieur Grossetête has just shown us at Argenteuil. The unreasonable price which the peasant attaches to the smallest scrap of his land makes it impossible to repurchase and restore a fine estate. Monsieur," he went on, indicating Grossetête, "has just mentioned the diminution in the raising of horses and cattle; well, the Code has much to do with that. The peasant-proprietor owns cows; he looks to them for his means of living; he sells the calves, he sells his butter; he never dreams of raising cattle, still less of raising horses; but as he cannot raise enough fodder to support his cows through a dry season, he sends them to market when he can feed them no longer. If by some fatal chance the hay were to fail for two years running, you would see a startling change the third year in the price of beef, but especially in that of veal."

"That may put a stop to 'patriotic banquets,'" said the doctor, laughing.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame Graslin, looking at Rou-

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baud, "can't politics get on without the wit of journalism, even here?"

"In this lamentable business, the bourgeoisie plays the same *rôle* as the pioneers of America," continued Clousier. "It buys up great estates, which the peasantry could not otherwise acquire. It cuts them up and then sells, either at auction or in small lots at private sale, to the peasants. Everything is judged by figures in these days, and I know none more eloquent than these. France has ninety-nine million acres, which, subtracting highways, roads, dunes, canals, and barren, uncultivated regions deserted by capital, may be reduced to eighty millions. Now out of eighty millions of acres to thirty-two millions of inhabitants we find one hundred and twenty-five millions of small lots registered on the tax-list (I don't give fractions). Thus, you will observe, we have gone to the utmost limit of agrarian law, and yet we have not seen the last of poverty or dissatisfaction. Those who divide territory into fragments and lessen production have, of course, plenty of organs to cry out that true social justice consists in giving every man a life interest, and no more, in a parcel of land; perpetual ownership, they say, is robbery. The Saint-Simonians are already proclaiming that doctrine."

"The magistrate has spoken," said Grossetête, "and here 's what the banker adds to those bold considerations. The fact that the peasantry and the lesser bourgeoisie can now acquire land does France an injury which the government seems not even to suspect. We may estimate the number of peasant families, omitting paupers, at three millions. These families

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subsist on wages. Wages are paid in money, and not in kind —"

"Yes, that's another blunder of our laws!" cried Clousier, interrupting the banker. "The right to pay in kind might have been granted in 1790; now, if we attempted to carry such a law, we should risk a revolution."

"Therefore, as I was about to say, the proletary draws to himself the money of the country," resumed Grossetête. "Now the peasant has no other passion, desire, or will, than to die a land-owner. This desire, as Monsieur Clousier has well shown, was born of the Revolution, and is the direct result of the sale of the National domain. A man must be ignorant indeed of what is going on all over France in the country regions if he is not aware that these three million families are yearly hoarding at least fifty francs, thus subtracting a hundred and fifty millions from current use. The science of political economy has made it an axiom that a five-franc piece, passing through a hundred hands in one day, is equivalent to five hundred francs. Now, it is perfectly plain to all of us who live in the country and observe the state of affairs, that every peasant has his eye on the land he covets; he is watching and waiting for it, and he never invests his savings elsewhere; he buries them. In seven years the savings thus rendered inert and unproductive amount to eleven hundred million francs. But since the lesser bourgeoisie bury as much more, with the same purpose, France loses every seven years the interest of at least two thousand millions, — that is to say, about one hundred millions; a loss which in forty-two years amounts to six hundred

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million francs. But she not only loses six hundred millions, she fails to create with that money manufacturing or agricultural products, which represent a loss of twelve hundred millions; for, if the manufactured product were not double in value to its cost price, commerce could not exist. The proletariat actually deprives itself of six hundred millions in wages. These six hundred millions of dead loss (representing to a stern economist a loss of twelve hundred millions, through lack of the benefits of circulation) explain the condition of inferiority in which our commerce, our merchant service, and our agriculture stand, as compared with England. In spite of the difference of the two territories, which is more than two thirds in our favor, England could remount the cavalry of two French armies, and she has meat for every man. But there, as the system of landed property makes it almost impossible for the lower classes to obtain it, money is not hoarded; it becomes commercial, and is turned over. Thus, besides the evil of parcelling the land, involving that of the diminution of horses, cattle, and sheep, the section of the Code on inheritance costs us six hundred millions of interest, lost by the hoarding of the money of the peasantry and bourgeoisie, and twelve hundred millions, at least, of products; or, including the loss from non-circulation, three thousand millions in half a century!"

"The moral effect is worse than the material effect," cried the rector. "We are making beggar-proprietors among the people and half-taught communities of the lesser bourgeoisie; and the fatal maxim 'Each for himself,' which had its effect upon the upper classes in

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July of this year, will soon have gangrened the middle classes. A proletariat devoid of sentiment, with no other god than envy, no other fanaticism than the despair of hunger, without faith, without belief, will come forward before long and put its foot on the heart of the nation. Foreigners, who have thriven under monarchical rule, will find that, having royalty, we have no king; having legality, we have no laws; having property, no owners; no government with our elections, no force with freedom, no happiness with equality. Let us hope that before that day comes God may raise up in France a providential man, one of those Elect who give a new mind to nations, and like Sylla or like Marius, whether he comes from above or rises from below, remakes society."

"He would be sent to the assizes," said Gérard. "The sentence pronounced against Socrates and Jesus Christ would be rendered against them in 1831. In these days as in the old days, envious mediocrity lets thinkers die of poverty, and so gets rid of the great political physicians who have studied the wounds of France, and who oppose the tendencies of their epoch. If they bear up under poverty, common minds ridicule them or call them dreamers. In France, men revolt in the moral world against the great man of the future, just as they revolt in the political world against a sovereign."

"In the olden time sophists talked to a limited number of men; to-day the periodical press enables them to lead astray a nation," cried the *juge de paix;* "and that portion of the press which pleads for right ideas finds no echo."

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The mayor looked at Monsieur Clousier in amazement. Madame Graslin, glad to find in a simple *juge de paix* a man whose mind was occupied with serious questions, said to Monsieur Roubaud, her neighbor, "Do you know Monsieur Clousier?"

"Not rightly until to-day, madame. You are doing miracles," he answered in a whisper. "And yet, look at his brow, how noble in shape! Is n't it like the classic or traditional brow given by sculptors to Lycurgus and the Greek sages? The revolution of July has an evidently retrograde tendency," said the doctor (who might in his student days have made a barricade himself), after carefully considering Grossetête's calculation.

"These ideas are threefold," continued Clousier. "You have talked of law and finance, but how is it with the government itself? The royal power, weakened by the doctrine of national sovereignty, in virtue of which the election of August 9, 1830, has just been made, will endeavor to counteract that rival principle which gives to the people the right to saddle the nation with a new dynasty every time it does not fully comprehend the ideas of its king. You will see that we shall then have internal struggles which will arrest for long periods together the progress of France."

"All these reefs have been wisely evaded by England," remarked Gérard. "I have been there; I admire that beehive, which sends its swarms over the universe and civilizes mankind, — a people among whom discussion is a political comedy, which satisfies the masses and hides the action of power, which then works freely in its upper sphere; a country where elections are not in the hands of a stupid bourgeoisie, as



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they are in France. If England were parcelled out into small holdings the nation would no longer exist. The land-owning class, the lords, guide the social mechanism. Their merchant-service, under the nose of Europe, takes possession of whole regions of the globe to meet the needs of their commerce and to get rid of their paupers and malcontents. Instead of fighting capacities, as we do, thwarting them, nullifying them, the English aristocratic class seeks out young talent, rewards it, and is constantly assimilating it. Everything which concerns the action of the government, in the choice of men and things, is prompt in England, whereas with us all is slow; and yet the English are slow by nature, while we are impatient. With them money is bold and actively employed; with us it is timid and suspicious. What Monsieur Grossetête has said of the industrial losses which the hoarding peasantry inflict on France has its proof in a fact I will show to you in two words: English capital, by its perpetual turning over, has created ten thousand millions of manufacturing and interest-bearing property; whereas French capital, which is far more abundant, has not created one tenth of that amount."

"And that is all the more extraordinary," said Roubaud, "because they are lymphatic, and we, as a general thing, are sanguine and energetic."

"Ah! monsieur," said Clousier, "there you touch a great question, which ought to be studied: How to find institutions properly adapted to repress the temperament of a people! Assuredly Cromwell was a great legislator. He alone made the England of to-day, by inventing the 'Navigation Act,' which has

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made the English enemies of all the world, and infused into them a ferocious pride and self-conceit, which is their mainstay. But, in spite of their Malta citadel, if France and Russia will only comprehend the part the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ought to be made to play in the future, the road to Asia through Egypt or by the Euphrates, made feasible by recent discoveries, will kill England, as in former times the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope killed Venice."

"Not one word of God's providence in all this!" cried the rector. "Monsieur Clousier and Monsieur Roubaud are oblivious of religion. How is it with you, monsieur?" he added, turning to Gérard.

"Protestant," put in Grossetête.

"You guessed it," cried Véronique, looking at the rector as she took Clousier's arm to return to the salon.

The prejudice Gérard's appearance excited against him had been quickly dispelled, and the three notables congratulated themselves on so good an acquisition.

"Unfortunately," said Monsieur Bonnet, "there is a cause of antagonism between Russia and the Catholic countries which border the Mediterranean, in the very unimportant schism which separates the Greek religion from the Latin religion; and it is a great misfortune for humanity."

"We all preach our own saint," said Madame Graslin. "Monsieur Grossetête thinks of the lost millions; Monsieur Clousier, of the overthrow of rights; the doctor here regards legislation as a question of temperaments; and the rector sees an obstacle to the good understanding of France and Russia in religion."

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"Add to that, madame," said Gérard, "that I see, in the hoarding of capital by the peasant and the small burgher, the postponement of the building of railroads in France."

"Then what is it you all want?" she asked.

"We want the wise State councillors who, under the Emperor, reflected on the laws, and a legislative body elected by the intelligence of the country as well as by the land-owners, whose only function would be to oppose bad legislation and capricious wars. The Chamber, as constituted to-day, will proceed, as you will soon see, to govern, and that is the first step to legal anarchy."

"Good God!" cried the rector, in a flush of sacred patriotism, "how can such enlightened minds as these," and he motioned to Clousier, Roubaud, and Gérard, "how can they see evil so clearly and suggest remedies without first looking within and applying a remedy to themselves? All of you, who represent the attacked classes, recognize the necessity of the passive obedience of the masses to the State, like that of soldiers during a war; you want the unity of power, and you desire that it shall never be brought into question. What England has obtained by the development of her pride and self-interest (a part of her creed) cannot be obtained in France but through sentiments due to Catholicism, and none of you are Catholics! Here am I, a priest, obliged to leave my own ground and argue with arguers. How can you expect the masses to become religious and obedient when they see irreligion and want of discipline above them? All peoples united by any faith whatever will inevitably get the better of

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peoples without any faith at all. The law of public interest, which gives birth to patriotism, is destroyed by the law of private interest, which it sanctions, but which gives birth to selfishness. There is nothing solid and durable but that which is natural; and the natural thing in human policy is the Family. The family must be the point of departure for all institutions. A universal effect proves a universal cause; and what you have just been setting forth as evident on all sides comes from the social principle itself; which is now without force because it has taken for its basis independence of thought and will, and such freedom is the parent of individualism. To make happiness depend on the stability, intelligence, and capacity of all is not as wise as to make happiness depend on the stability and intelligence of institutions and the capacity of a single head. It is easier to find wisdom in one man than in a whole nation. Peoples have heart and no eyes; they feel, and see not. Governments ought to see, and not determine anything through sentiment. There is, therefore, an evident contradiction between the impulses of the multitude and the action of power whose function it is to direct and unify those impulses. To meet with a great prince is certainly a rare chance (to use your term), but to trust to a whole assembly, even though it be composed of honest men only, is folly. France is committing that folly at this moment. Alas! you are just as much convinced of it as I am. If all right-minded men, like yourselves, would only set an example around them, if all intelligent hands would raise, in the great republic of souls, the altars of the one

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Church which has set the interests of humanity before her, we might again behold in France the miracles our fathers did here."

"But the difficulty is, monsieur," said Gérard, — "if I may speak to you with the freedom of the confessional, — I look upon faith as a lie we tell to ourselves, on hope as a lie we tell about the future, and on charity as a trick for children to keep them good by the promise of sugar-plums."

"Still, we sleep better for being rocked by hope, monsieur," said Madame Graslin.

This speech stopped Roubaud, who was about to reply; its effect was strengthened by a look from Grossetête and the rector.

"Is it our fault," said Clousier, "that Jesus Christ had not the time to formulate a government in accordance with his moral teaching, as did Moses and Confucius, the two greatest human law-givers? — witness the existence, as a nation, of the Jews and Chinese, the former in spite of their dispersion over the whole earth, and the latter in spite of their isolation."

"Ah! dear me! what work you are cutting out for me!" cried the rector, naïvely. "But I shall triumph, I shall convert you all! You are much nearer to the true faith than you think you are. Truth always lurks behind falsehood; go on a step, turn round, and then you'll see it."

This little outburst of the good rector had the effect of changing the conversation.

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## XVIII.

### CATHERINE CURIEUX.

Before taking his departure the next day, Monsieur Grossetête promised Véronique to associate himself in all her plans, as soon as the realization of them was a practicable thing. Madame Graslin and Gérard accompanied his carriage on horseback, and did not leave him till they reached the junction of the high-road of Montégnac with that from Bordeaux to Lyon. The engineer was so impatient to see the land he was to reclaim, and Véronique so impatient to show it to him, that they had planned this expedition the evening before.

After bidding adieu to the kind old man, they turned off the road across the vast plain, and skirted the mountain chain from the foot of the rise which led to the château to the steep face of the Roche Vive. The engineer then saw plainly the shelf or barricade of rock mentioned by Farrabesche; which forms, as it were, the lowest foundation of the hills. By so directing the water that it should not overflow the indestructible canal which Nature had built, and by clearing out the accumulation of earth which choked it up, irrigation would be helped rather than hindered by this natural sluice-way, which was raised, on an average, ten feet above the plain. The first important point was to esti-

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mate the amount of water flowing through the Gabou, and to make sure whether or not the slopes of the valley allowed any to escape in other directions.

Véronique gave Farrabesche a horse, and directed him to accompany the engineer and to explain to him everything he had himself noticed. After several days' careful exploration, Gérard found that the base of the two parallel slopes was sufficiently solid, though different in composition, to hold the water, allowing none to escape. During the month of January, which was rainy, he estimated the quantity of water flowing through the Gabou. This quantity, added to that of three streams which could easily be led into it, would supply water enough to irrigate a tract of land three times as extensive as the plain of Montégnac. The damming of the Gabou and the works necessary to direct the water of the three valleys to the plain, ought not to cost more than sixty thousand francs; for the engineer discovered on the commons a quantity of calcareous soil which would furnish the lime cheaply, the forest was close at hand, the wood and stone cost nothing, and the transportation was trifling. While awaiting the season when the Gabou would be dry (the only time suitable for the work) all the necessary preparations could be made so as to push the enterprise through rapidly when it was once begun.

But the preparation of the plain was another thing; that according to Gérard, would cost not less than two hundred thousand francs, without including the sowing and planting. The plain was to be divided into square compartments of two hundred and fifty acres each, where the ground had to be cleared, not only of its

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stunted growths, but of rocks. Laborers would have to dig innumerable trenches, and stone them up so as to let no water run to waste, also to direct its flow at will. This part of the enterprise needed the active and faithful arms of conscientious workers. Chance provided them with a tract of land without natural obstacles, a long even stretch of plain, where the waters, having a fall of ten feet, could be distributed at will. Nothing hindered the finest agricultural results, while at the same time, the eye would be gratified by one of those magnificent sheets of verdure which are the pride and the wealth of Lombardy. Gérard sent for an old and experienced foreman, who had already been employed by him elsewhere in this capacity, named Fresquin.

Madame Graslin wrote to Grossetête, requesting him to negotiate for her a loan of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, secured on her income from the Funds, which, if relinquished for six years, would be enough to pay both capital and interest. This loan was obtained in March. By this time the preliminary preparations carried on by Gérard and his foreman, Fresquin, were fully completed; also, the surveying, estimating, levelling, and sounding. The news of this great enterprise spreading about the country, stimulated the labouring population. The indefatigable Farrabesche, Colorat, Clousier, the mayor of Montégnac, Roubaud, and others, interested either in the welfare of the neighborhood or in Madame Graslin, selected such of these laborers as seemed the poorest, or were most deserving of employment. Gérard bought for himself and for Monsieur Grossetête a thousand

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acres on the other side of the high-road to Montégnac. Fresquin, the foreman, bought five hundred, and sent for his wife and children.

Early in April, 1832, Monsieur Grossetête came to see the land bought for him by Gérard, though his journey was chiefly occasioned by the advent of Catherine Curieux, who had come from Paris to Limoges by the diligence. Grossetête now brought her with him to Montégnac. He found Madame Graslin just starting for church. Monsieur Bonnet was to say a mass to implore the blessing of heaven on the works that were then beginning. All the laborers with their wives and children were present.

"Here is your protégée," said the old gentleman, presenting to Véronique a feeble, suffering woman, apparently about thirty years of age.

"Are you Catherine Curieux?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Yes, madame."

Véronique looked at Catherine for a moment. She was rather tall, well-made, and fair; her features wore an expression of extreme gentleness which the beautiful gray tones of the eyes did not contradict. The outline of the face, the shape of the brow had a nobility both simple and august, such as we sometimes meet with in country regions among very young girls, — a sort of flower of beauty, which field labors, the constant cares of the household, the burning of the sun, and want of personal care, remove with terrible rapidity. Her movements had that ease of motion characteristic of country girls, to which certain habits unconsciously contracted in Paris gave additional grace. If Cathe-

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rine had remained in the Corrèze she would by this time have looked an old woman, wrinkled and withered; her complexion, once rosy, would have coarsened; but Paris, though it paled her, had preserved her beauty. Illness, toil, and grief had endowed her with the mysterious gifts of melancholy, the inward vitalizing thought, which is lacking to poor country-folk whose lives are almost animal. Her dress, full of that Parisian taste which all women, even the least coquettish, contract so readily, distinguished her still further from an ordinary peasant-woman. In her ignorance as to what was before her, and having no means of judging Madame Graslin, she appeared very shy and shame-faced.

"Do you still love Farrabesche?" asked Véronique, when Grossetête left them for a moment.

"Yes, madame," she replied coloring.

"Why then, having sent him a thousand francs during his imprisonment, did you not join him after his release? Have you any repugnance to him? Speak to me as though I were your mother. Are you afraid he has become altogether corrupt; or did you fear he no longer wanted you?"

"Neither, madame; but I do not know how to read or write, and I was serving a very exacting old lady; she fell ill and I had to nurse her. Though I knew the time when Jacques would be released, I could not get away from Paris till after the lady's death. She did not leave me anything, notwithstanding my devotion to her interests and to her personally. After that I wanted to be cured of an ailment caused by night-watching and hard work, and as I had used up my savings, I resolved to go to the hospital of Saint-Louis, which I have just left, cured."

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"Very good, my child," said Madame Graslin, touched by this simple explanation. "But tell me now why you abandoned your parents so abruptly, why you left your child behind you, and why you did not send any news of yourself, or get some one to write for you."

For all answer Catherine wept.

"Madame," she said at last, reassured by the pressure of Madame Graslin's hand, "I may have done wrong, but I had n't the strength to stay here. I did not fear myself, but others; I feared gossip, scandal. So long as Jacques was in danger, I was necessary to him and I stayed; but after he had gone I had no strength left, — a girl with a child and no husband! The worst of creatures was better than I. I don't know what would have become of me had I stayed to hear a word against my boy or his father; I should have gone mad; I might have killed myself. My father or my mother in a moment of anger might have reproached me. I am too sensitive to bear a quarrel or an insult, gentle as I am. I have had my punishment in not seeing my child, I who have never passed a day without thinking of him in all these years! I wished to be forgotten, and I have been. No one thought of me, — they believed me dead; and yet, many a time, I thought of leaving all just to come here for a day and see my child."

"Your child — see, here he is."

Catherine then saw Benjamin and began to tremble violently.

"Benjamin," said Madame Graslin, "come and kiss your mother."

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"My mother!" cried Benjamin, surprised. He jumped into Catherine's arms and she pressed him to her breast with almost savage force. But the boy escaped her and ran off crying out: "I'll go and fetch *him*."

Madame Graslin made Catherine, who was almost fainting, sit down. At this moment she saw Monsieur Bonnet and could not help blushing as she met a piercing look from her confessor, which read her heart.

"I hope," she said, trembling, "that you will consent to marry Farrabesche and Catherine at once. Don't you recognize Monsieur Bonnet, my dear? He will tell you that Farrabesche, since his liberation has behaved as an honest man; the whole neighborhood thinks well of him, and if there is a place in the world where you may live happy and respected it is at Montégnac. You can make, by God's help, a good living as my farmers; for Farrabesche has recovered citizenship."

"That is all true, my dear child," said the rector.

Just then Farrabesche appeared, pulled along by his son. He was pale and speechless in presence of Catherine and Madame Graslin. His heart told him how actively benevolent the one had been, and how deeply the other had suffered in his absence. Véronique led away the rector, who, on his side, was anxious to talk with her alone.

As soon as they were far enough away not to be overheard, Monsieur Bonnet looked fixedly at Véronique; she colored and dropped her eyes like a guilty person.

"You degrade well-doing," he said, sternly.

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"How?" she asked, raising her head.

"Well-doing," he replied, "is a passion as superior to that of love as humanity is superior to the individual creature. Now, you have not done this thing from the sole impulse and simplicity of virtue. You have fallen from the heights of humanity to the indulgence of the individual creature. Your benevolence to Farrabesche and Catherine carries with it so many memories and hidden thoughts that it has lost all merit in the eyes of God. Tear from your heart the remains of the javelin evil planted there. Do not take from your actions their true value. Come at last to that saintly ignorance of the good you do which is the grace supreme of human actions."

Madame Graslin had turned away to wipe the tears that told the rector his words had touched the bleeding wound that was still unhealed in her heart.

Farrabesche, Catherine, and Benjamin now came up to thank their benefactress, but she made them a sign to go away and leave her alone with the rector.

"See how that grieves them," she said to him as they sadly walked away. The rector, whose heart was tender, recalled them by a sign.

"You shall be completely happy," she then said, giving to Farrabesche a paper which she was holding in her hand. "Here is the ordinance which gives you back your rights of citizenship and exempts you from humiliating inspection."

Farrabesche respectfully kissed the hand held toward him and looked at Véronique with an eye both tender and submissive, calm and devoted, the expression of a devotion which nothing could ever change, the look of a dog to his master.

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"If Jacques has suffered, madame," said Catherine, her fine eyes lighting with pleasure, "I hope I can give him enough happiness to make up for his pain, for, no matter what he has done, he is not bad."

Madame Graslin turned away her head; she seemed overcome by the sight of that happy family. The rector now left her to enter the church, whither she dragged herself presently on the arm of Monsieur Grossetête.

After breakfast every one, even the aged people of the village, assembled to see the beginning of the great work. From the slope leading up to the château, Monsieur Grossetête and Monsieur Bonnet, between whom was Véronique, could see the direction of the four first cuttings marked out by piles of gathered stones. At each cutting five laborers were digging out and piling up the good loam along the edges; clearing a space about eighteen feet wide, the width of each road. On either side, four other men were digging the ditches and also piling up the loam at the sides to make a bank. Behind them, as the banks were made, two men were digging holes in which others planted trees. In each of these divisions, thirty old paupers, a score of women, and forty or more girls and children were picking up stones, which special laborers piled in heaps along the roadsides so as to keep a record of the quantity gathered by each group. Thus the work went on rapidly, with picked workmen full of ardor. Grossetête promised Madame Graslin to send her some trees and to ask her other friends to do the same; for the nurseries of the château would evidently not suffice to supply such an extensive plantation. Toward the

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close of the day, which was to end in a grand dinner at the château, Farrabesche requested Madame Graslin to grant him an audience for a few moments.

"Madame," he said, presenting himself with Catherine, "you were so good as to offer me the farm at the château. By granting me so great a favor I know you intended to put me in the way of making my fortune. But Catherine has ideas about our future which we desire to submit to you. If I were to succeed and make money there would certainly be persons envious of my good fortune; a word is soon said; I might have quarrels, — I fear them; besides, Catherine would always be uneasy. In short, too close intercourse with the world will not suit us. I have come therefore to ask you to give us only the land at the opening of the Gabou on the commons, with a small piece of the woodland behind the Roche Vive. In July you will have a great many workmen here, and it would be very easy then to build a farmhouse in a good position on the slope of the hill. We should be happy there. I will send for Guépin. My poor comrade will work like a horse; perhaps I could marry him here. My son is not a do-nothing either. No one would put us out of countenance; we could colonize this corner of the estate, and I should make it my ambition to turn it into a fine farm for you. Moreover, I want to propose as farmer of your great farm near the château a cousin of Catherine, who has money and would therefore be more capable than I could be of managing such a large affair as that farm. If it please God to bless your enterprise, in five years from now you will have five or six thousand horned beasts or horses on that plain

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below, and it wants a better head than mine to manage them."

Madame Graslin agreed to his request, doing justice to the good sense of it.

From the time the work on the plain began, Véronique's life assumed the regularity of country existence. In the morning she heard mass, took care of her son, whom she idolized, and went to see her laborers. After dinner she received her friends from Montégnac in the little salon to right of the clock-tower. She taught Roubaud, Clousier, and the rector to play whist, which Gérard knew already. The rubbers usually ended at nine o'clock, after which the company withdrew. This peaceful life had no other events to mark it than the success of the various parts of the great enterprise.

In June the torrent of the Gabou went dry, and Gérard established his headquarters in the keeper's house. Farrabesche had already built his farmhouse, which he called Le Gabou. Fifty masons, brought from Paris, joined the two mountains by a wall twenty feet thick, with a foundation twelve feet deep and heavily cemented. The wall, or dam, rose nearly sixty feet and tapered in until it was not more than ten feet thick at the summit. Gérard backed this wall on the valley side with a cemented slope, about twelve feet wide at its base. On the side toward the commons a similar slope, covered with several feet of arable earth, still further supported this great work, which no rush of water could possibly damage. The engineer provided in case of unusual rains an overflow at a proper height. The masonry was inserted into the flank of each



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mountain until the granite or the hard-pan was reached, so that the water had absolutely no outlet at the sides.

This dam was finished by the middle of August. At the same time Gérard was preparing three canals in the principal valleys, and none of these works came up to his estimated costs. The château farm could now be finished. The irrigation channels through the plain, superintended by Fresquin, started from the canal made by nature along the base of the mountains on the plain side, through which culverts were cut to the irrigating channels. Water-gates were fitted into those channels, the sides of which the abundance of rock had enabled them to stone up, so as to keep the flow of water at an even height along the plain.

Every Sunday after mass, Véronique, the engineer, the rector, the doctor, and the mayor walked down through the park to see the course of the waters. The winter of 1832 and 1833 was extremely rainy. The water of the three streams which had been directed to the torrent, swollen by the water of the rains, now formed three ponds in the valley of the Gabou, carefully placed at different levels so as to create a steady reserve in case of a severe drought. At certain places where the valley widened Gérard had taken advantage of a few hillocks to make islands and plant them with trees of varied foliage. These vast operations completely changed the face of the country; but five or six years were of course needed to bring out their full character. "The country was naked," said Farrabesche, "and madame has clothed it."

Since these great undertakings were begun, Véronique had been called "Madame" throughout the

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whole neighborhood. When the rains ceased in June, 1833, they tried the irrigating channels through the planted fields, and the young verdure thus nourished soon showed the superior qualities of the *marciti* of Italy and the meadows of Switzerland. The system of irrigation, modelled on that of the farms in Lombardy, watered the earth evenly, and kept the surface as smooth as a carpet. The nitre of the snow dissolving in these channels no doubt added much to the quality of the herbage. The engineer hoped to find in the products of succeeding years some analogy with those of Switzerland, to which this nitrous substance is, as we know, a source of perpetual riches.

The plantations along the roads, sufficiently moistened by the water allowed to run through the ditches, made rapid growth. So that in 1838, six years after Madame Graslin had begun her enterprise, the stony plain, regarded as hopelessly barren by twenty generations, was verdant, productive, and well planted throughout. Gérard had built five farmhouses with their dependencies upon it, with a thousand acres to each. Gérard's own farm and those of Grossetête and Fresquin, which received the overflow from Madame Graslin's domains, were built on the same plan and managed by the same methods. The engineer also built a charming little house for himself on his own property. When all was completely finished, the inhabitants of Montégnac, instigated by the present mayor, who was anxious to retire, elected Gérard to the mayoralty of the district.

In 1840 the departure of the first herd of cattle sent from Montégnac to the Paris markets was made the

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occasion of a rural fête. The farms of the plain raised fine beasts and horses; for it was found, after the land was cleaned up, that there were seven inches of good soil which the annual fall of leaves, the manure left by the pasturage of animals, and, above all, the melting of the snows contained in the valley of the Gabou, increased in fertility.

It was in this year that Madame Graslin felt it necessary to obtain a tutor for her son, who was now eleven years of age. She did not wish to part with him, and yet she was anxious to make him a thoroughly well-educated man. Monsieur Bonnet wrote to the Seminary. Madame Graslin, on her side, said a few words as to her wishes and the difficulty of obtaining the right person to Monseigneur Dutheil, recently appointed archbishop. The choice of such a man, who would live nine years familiarly in the château, was a serious matter. Gérard had already offered to teach mathematics to his friend Francis; but he could not, of course, take the place of a regular tutor. This question agitated Madame Graslin's mind, and all the more because she knew that her health was beginning to fail.

The more prosperous grew her dear Montégnac, the more she increased the secret austerities of her life. Monseigneur Dutheil, with whom she corresponded regularly, found at last the man she wanted. He sent her from his late diocese a young professor, twenty-five years of age, named Ruffin, whose mind had a special vocation for the art of teaching. This young man's knowledge was great, and his nature was one of deep feeling, which, however, did not preclude the sternness necessary in the management of youth. In him religion

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did not in any way hamper knowledge; he was also patient, and extremely agreeable in appearance and manner. "I make you a fine present, my dear daughter," wrote the prelate; "this young man is fit to educate a prince; therefore I think you will be glad to arrange the future with him, for he can undoubtedly be a spiritual father to your son."

Monsieur Ruffin proved so satisfactory to Madame Graslin's faithful friends that his arrival made no change in the various intimacies that grouped themselves around this beloved idol, whose hours and moments were claimed by each with jealous eagerness.

By the year 1843 the prosperity of Montégnac had increased beyond all expectation. The farm of the Gabou rivalled the farms of the plain, and that of the château set an example of constant improvement to all. The five other farms, increasing in value, obtained higher rent, reaching the sum of thirty thousand francs for each at the end of twelve years. The farmers, who were beginning to gather in the fruits of their sacrifices and those of Madame Graslin, now began to improve the grass of the plains, sowing seed of better quality, there being no longer any occasion to fear drought.

During this year a man from Montégnac started a diligence between the chief town of the arrondissement and Limoges, leaving both places each day. Monsieur Clousier's nephew sold his office and obtained a license as notary in Montégnac. The government appointed Fresquin collector of the district. The new notary built himself a pretty house in the upper part of Montégnac, planted mulberries in the grounds, and became after a time assistant-mayor to his friend Gérard.

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The engineer, encouraged by so much success, now conceived a scheme of a nature to render Madame Graslin's fortune colossal, — she herself having by this time recovered possession of the income which had been mortgaged for the repayment of the loan. Gérard's new scheme was to make a canal of the little river, and turn into it the superabundant waters of the Gabou. This canal, which he intended to carry into the Vienne, would form a waterway by which to send down timber from the twenty thousand acres of forest land belonging to Madame Graslin in Montégnac, now admirably managed by Colorat, but which, for want of transportation, returned no profit. A thousand acres could be cut over each year without detriment to the forest, and if sent in this way to Limoges, would find a ready market for building purposes.

This was the original plan of Monsieur Graslin himself, who had paid very little attention to the rector's scheme relating to the plain, being much more attracted by that of turning the little river into a canal.

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## XIX.

### A DEATH BLOW.

At the beginning of the following year, in spite of Madame Graslin's assumption of strength, her friends began to notice symptoms which foreshadowed her coming death. To all the doctor's remarks, and to the inquiries of the most clear-sighted of her friends, Véronique made the invariable answer that she was perfectly well. But when the spring opened she went round to visit her forests, farms, and beautiful meadows with a childlike joy and delight which betrayed to those who knew her best a sad foreboding.

Finding himself obliged to build a small cemented wall between the dam of the Gabou and the park of Montégnac along the base of the hill called especially La Corrèze, Gérard took up the idea of inclosing the whole forest and thus uniting it with the park. Madame Graslin agreed to this, and appropriated thirty thousand francs a year to this work, which would take seven years to accomplish and would then withdraw that fine forest from the rights exercised by government over the non-inclosed forests of private individuals. The three ponds of the Gabou would thus become a part of the park. These ponds, ambitiously called lakes, had each its island.

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This year, Gérard had prepared, in collusion with Grossetête, a surprise for Madame Graslin's birthday. He had built a little hermitage on the largest of the islands, rustic on the outside and elegantly arranged within. The old banker took part in the conspiracy, in which Farrabesche, Fresquin, Clousier's nephew, and nearly all the well-to-do people in Montégnac co-operated. Grossetête sent down some beautiful furniture. The clock tower, copied from that at Vévay, made a charming effect in the landscape. Six boats, two for each pond, were secretly built, painted, and rigged during the winter by Farrabesche and Guépin, assisted by the carpenter of Montégnac.

When the day arrived (about the middle of May) after a breakfast Madame Graslin gave to her friends, she was taken by them across the park — which was finely laid out by Gérard, who, for the last five years, had improved it like a landscape architect and naturalist — to the pretty meadow of the valley of the Gabou, where, at the shore of the first lake, two of the boats were floating. This meadow, watered by several clear streamlets, lay at the foot of the fine amphitheatre where the valley of the Gabou begins. The woods, cleared in a scientific manner, so as to produce noble masses and vistas that were charming to the eye, inclosed the meadow and gave it a solitude that was grateful to the soul. Gérard had reproduced on an eminence that chalet in the valley of Sion above the road to Brieg which travellers admire so much; here were to be the dairy and the cow-sheds of the château. From its gallery the eye roved over the landscape created by the engineer which the three lakes made

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worthy of comparison with the beauties of Switzerland.

The day was beautiful. In the blue sky, not a cloud; on earth, all the charming, graceful things the soil offers in the month of May. The trees planted ten years earlier on the banks — weeping willows, osier, alder, ash, the aspen of Holland, the poplars of Italy and Virginia, hawthorns and roses, acacias, birches, all choice growths arranged as their nature and the lay of the land made suitable — held amid their foliage a few fleecy vapors, born of the waters, which rose like a slender smoke. The surface of the lakelet, clear as a mirror and calm as the sky, reflected the tall green masses of the forest, the tops of which, distinctly defined in the limpid atmosphere, contrasted with the groves below wrapped in their pretty veils. The lakes, separated by broad causeways, were three mirrors showing different reflections, the waters of which flowed from one to another in melodious cascades. These causeways were used to go from lake to lake without passing round the shores. From the chalet could be seen, through a vista among the trees, the thankless waste of the chalk commons, resembling an open sea and contrasting with the fresh beauty of the lakes and their verdure.

When Véronique saw the joyousness of her friends as they held out their hands to help her into the largest of the boats, tears came into her eyes and she kept silence till they touched the bank of the first causeway. As she stepped into the second boat she saw the hermitage with Grossetête sitting on a bench before it with all his family.

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"Do they wish to make me regret dying?" she said to the rector.

"We wish to prevent you from dying," replied Clousier.

"You cannot make the dead live," she answered.

Monsieur Bonnet gave her a stern look which recalled her to herself.

"Let me take care of your health," said Roubaud, in a gentle, persuasive voice. "I am sure I can save to this region its living glory, and to all our friends their common tie."

Véronique bowed her head, and Gérard rowed slowly toward the island in the middle of the lake, the largest of the three, into which the overflowing water of the first was rippling with a sound that gave a voice to that delightful landscape.

"You have done well to make me bid farewell to this ravishing nature on such a day," she said, looking at the beauty of the trees, all so full of foliage that they hid the shore. The only disapprobation her friends allowed themselves to show was a gloomy silence; and Véronique, receiving another glance from Monsieur Bonnet, sprang lightly ashore, assuming a lively air, which she did not relinquish. Once more the hostess, she was charming, and the Grossetête family felt she was again the beautiful Madame Graslin of former days.

"Indeed, you can still live, if you choose!" said her mother in a whisper.

At this gay festival, amid these glorious creations produced by the resources of nature only, nothing seemed likely to wound Véronique, and yet it was here and now that she received her death-blow.

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The party were to return about nine o'clock by way of the meadows, the road through which, as lovely as an English or an Italian road, was the pride of its engineer. The abundance of small stones, laid aside when the plain was cleared, enabled him to keep it in good order; in fact, for the last five years it was, in a way, macadamized. Carriages were awaiting the company at the opening of the last valley toward the plain, almost at the base of the Roche Vive. The horses, raised at Montégnac, were among the first that were ready for the market. The manager of the stud had selected a dozen for the stables of the château, and their present fine appearance was part of the programme of the fête. Madame Graslin's own carriage, a gift from Grossetête, was drawn by four of the finest animals, plainly harnessed.

After dinner the happy party went to take coffee in a little wooden kiosk, made like those on the Bosphorus, and placed on a point of the island from which the eye could reach to the farther lake beyond. From this spot Madame Graslin thought she saw her son Francis near the nursery-ground formerly planted by Farrabesche. She looked again, but did not see him; and Monsieur Ruffin pointed him out to her, playing on the bank with Grossetête's grandchildren. Véronique became alarmed lest he should meet with some accident. Not listening to remonstrance, she ran down from the kiosk, and jumping into a boat, began to row toward her son. This little incident caused a general departure. Monsieur Grossetête proposed that they should all follow her and walk on the beautiful shore of the lake, along the curves of the mountainous bluffs

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On landing there Madame Graslin saw her son in the arms of a woman in deep mourning. Judging by the shape of her bonnet and the style of her clothes, the woman was a foreigner. Véronique was startled, and called to her son, who presently came toward her.

"Who is that woman?" she asked the children round about her; "and why did Francis leave you to go to her?"

"The lady called him by name," said a little girl.

At that instant Madame Sauviat and Gérard, who had outstripped the rest of the company, came up.

"Who is that woman, my dear child?" asked Madame Graslin as soon as Francis reached her.

"I don't know," he answered; "but she kissed me as you and grandmamma kiss me — she cried," whispered Francis in his mother's ear.

"Shall I go after her?" asked Gérard.

"No!" said Madame Graslin, with an abruptness that was not usual in her.

With a delicacy for which Véronique was grateful, Gérard led away the children and went back to detain the rest of the party, leaving Madame Sauviat, Madame Graslin, and Francis alone.

"What did she say to you?" asked Madame Sauviat of her grandson.

"I don't know; she did not speak French."

"Could n't you understand anything she said?" asked Véronique.

"No; but she kept saying over and over, — and that 's why I remember it, — *My dear brother!*"

Véronique took her mother's arm and led her son by

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the hand; but she had scarcely gone a dozen steps before her strength gave way.

"What is the matter? what has happened?" said the others, who now came up, to Madame Sauviat.

"Oh! my daughter is in danger!" said the old woman, in guttural tones.

It was necessary to carry Madame Graslin to her carriage. She signed to Aline to get into it with Francis, and also Gérard.

"You have been in England," she said to the latter as soon as she recovered herself, "and therefore no doubt you speak English; tell me the meaning of the words, *my dear brother*."

On being told, Véronique exchanged a look with Aline and her mother which made them shudder; but they restrained their feelings.

The shouts and joyous cries of those who were assisting in the departure of the carriages, the splendor of the setting sun as it lay upon the meadows, the perfect gait of the beautiful horses, the laughter of her friends as they followed her on horseback at a gallop,—none of these things roused Madame Graslin from her torpor. Her mother ordered the coachman to hasten his horses, and their carriage reached the château some time before the others. When the company were again assembled, they were told that Véronique had gone to her rooms and was unable to see any one.

"I fear," said Gérard to his friends, "that Madame Graslin has had some fatal shock."

"Where? how?" they asked.

"To her heart," he answered.

The following day Roubaud started for Paris. He

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had seen Madame Graslin, and found her so seriously ill that he wished for the assistance and advice of the ablest physician of the day. But Véronique had only received Roubaud to put a stop to her mother and Aline's entreaties that she would do something to benefit her; she herself knew that death had stricken her. She refused to see Monsieur Bonnet, sending word to him that the time had not yet come. Though all her friends who had come from Limoges to celebrate her birthday wished to be with her, she begged them to excuse her from fulfilling the duties of hospitality, saying that she desired to remain in the deepest solitude. After Roubaud's departure the other guests returned to Limoges, less disappointed than distressed; for all those whom Grossetête had brought with him adored Véronique. They were lost in conjecture as to what might have caused this mysterious disaster.

One evening, two days after the departure of the company, Aline brought Catherine to Madame Graslin's apartment. La Farrabesche stopped short, horrified at the change so suddenly wrought in her mistress, whose face seemed to her almost distorted.

"Good God, madame!" she cried, "what harm that girl has done! If we had only foreseen it, Farrabesche and I, we would never have taken her in. She has just heard that madame is ill, and sends me to tell Madame Sauviat she wants to speak to her."

"Here!" cried Veronique. "Where is she?"

"My husband took her to the chalet."

"Very good," said Madame Graslin; "tell Farrabesche to go elsewhere. Inform that lady that my mother will go to her; tell her to expect the visit."

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As soon as it was dark Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, walked slowly through the park to the chalet. The moon was shining with all its brilliancy, the air was soft, and the two women, visibly affected, found encouragement, of a sort, in the things of nature. The mother stopped now and then, to rest her daughter, whose sufferings were poignant, so that it was well-nigh midnight before they reached the path that goes down from the woods to the sloping meadow where the silvery roof of the chalet shone. The moonlight gave to the surface of the quiet water, the tint of pearls. The little noises of the night, echoing in the silence, made softest harmony. Véronique sat down on the bench of the chalet, amid this beauteous scene of the starry night. The murmur of two voices and the footfall of two persons still at a distance on the sandy shore were brought by the water, which sometimes, when all is still, reproduces sounds as faithfully as it reflects objects on its surface. Véronique recognized at once the exquisite voice of the rector, and the rustle of his cassock, also the movement of some silken stuff that was probably the material of a woman's gown.

"Let us go in," she said to her mother.

Madame Sauviat and her daughter sat down on a crib in the lower room, which was intended for a stable.

"My child," they heard the rector saying, "I do not blame you, — you are quite excusable; but your return may be the cause of irreparable evil; she is the soul of this region."

"Ah! monsieur, then I had better go away to-night," replied the stranger. "though — I must tell you — to leave my country once more is death to

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me. If I had stayed a day longer in that horrible New York, where there is neither hope, nor faith, nor charity, I should have died without being ill. The air I breathed oppressed my chest, food did not nourish me, I was dying while full of life and vigor. My sufferings ceased the moment I set foot upon the vessel to return; I seemed to be already in France. Oh! monsieur, I saw my mother and one of my sisters-in-law die of grief. My grandfather and grandmother Tascheron are dead; dead, my dear Monsieur Bonnet, in spite of the prosperity of Tascheronville, — for my father founded a village in Ohio and gave it that name. That village is now almost a town, and a third of all the land is cultivated by members of our family, whom God has constantly protected. Our tillage succeeded, our crops have been enormous, and we are rich. The town is Catholic, and we have managed to build a Catholic church; we do not allow any other form of worship, and we hope to convert by our example the many sects which surround us. True religion is in a minority in that land of money and selfish interests, where the soul is cold. Nevertheless, I will return to die there, sooner than do harm or cause distress to the mother of our Francis. Only, Monsieur Bonnet, take me to-night to the parsonage that I may pray upon *his* tomb, the thought of which has brought me here; the nearer I have come to where *he* is, the more I felt myself another being. No, I never expected to feel so happy again as I do here."

"Well, then," said the rector, "come with me now. If there should come a time when you might return without doing injury, I will write to you, Denise; but

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perhaps this visit to your birthplace will stop the home-sickness, and enable you to live over there without suffering — "

"Oh! to leave this country, now so beautiful! What wonders Madame Graslin has done for it!" she exclaimed, pointing to the lake as it lay in the moonlight. "All this fine domain will belong to our dear Francis."

"You shall not go away, Denise," said Madame Graslin, who was standing at the stable door.

Jean-François Tascheron's sister clasped her hands on seeing the spectre which addressed her. At that moment the pale Véronique, standing in the moonlight, was like a shade defined upon the darkness of the open door-way. Her eyes alone shone like stars.

"No, my child, you shall not leave the country you have come so far to see again; you shall be happy here, or God will refuse to help me; it is He, no doubt, who has brought you back."

She took the astonished Denise by the hand, and led her away by a path toward the other shore of the lake, leaving her mother and the rector, who seated themselves on the bench.

"Let her do as she wishes," said Madame Sauviat.

A few moments later Véronique returned alone, and was taken back to the château by her mother and Monsieur Bonnet. Doubtless she had formed some plan which required secrecy, for no one in the neighborhood either saw Denise or heard any mention of her.

Madame Graslin took to her bed that day and never but once left it again; she went from bad to worse



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daily, and seemed annoyed and thwarted that she could not rise, — trying to do so on several occasions, and expressing a desire to walk out into the park. A few days, however, after the scene we have just related, about the beginning of June, she made a violent effort, rose, dressed as if for a gala day, and begged Gérard to give her his arm, declaring that she was resolved to take a walk. She gathered up all her strength and expended it on this expedition, accomplishing her intention in a paroxysm of will which had, necessarily, a fatal reaction.

"Take me to the chalet, and alone," she said to Gérard in a soft voice, looking at him with a sort of coquetry. "This is my last excursion; I dreamed last night the doctors arrived and captured me."

"Do you want to see your woods?" asked Gérard.

"For the last time, yes," she answered. "But what I really want," she added, in a coaxing voice, "is to make you a singular proposition."

She asked Gérard to embark with her in one of the boats on the second lake, to which she went on foot. When the young man, surprised at her intention, began to move the oars, she pointed to the hermitage as the object of her coming.

"My friend," she said, after a long pause, during which she had been contemplating the sky and water, the hills and shores, "I have a strange request to make of you; but I think you are a man who would obey my wishes —"

"In all things, sure that you can wish only what is good."

"I wish to marry you," she answered; "if you con-

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sent you will accomplish the wish of a dying woman, which is certain to secure your happiness."

"I am too ugly," said the engineer.

"The person to whom I refer is pretty; she is young, and wishes to live at Montégnac. If you will marry her you will help to soften my last hours. I will not dwell upon her virtues now; I only say her nature is a rare one; in the matter of grace and youth and beauty, one look will suffice; you are now about to see her at the hermitage. As we return home you must give me a serious yes or no."

Hearing this confidence, Gérard unconsciously quickened his oars, which made Madame Graslin smile. Denise, who was living alone, away from all eyes, at the hermitage, recognized Madame Graslin and immediately opened the door. Véronique and Gérard entered. The poor girl could not help a blush as she met the eyes of the young man, who was greatly surprised at her beauty.

"I hope Madame Farrabesche has not let you want for anything?" said Véronique.

"Oh no! madame, see!" and she pointed to her breakfast.

"This is Monsieur Gérard, of whom I spoke to you," went on Véronique. "He is to be my son's guardian, and after my death you shall live together at the château until his majority."

"Oh! madame, do not talk in that way!"

"My dear child, look at me!" replied Véronique, addressing Denise, in whose eyes the tears rose instantly. "She has just arrived from New York," she added, by way of introduction to Gérard.

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The engineer put several questions about the new world to the young woman, while Véronique, leaving them alone, went to look at the third and more distant lake of the Gabou. It was six o'clock as Véronique and Gérard returned in the boat toward the chalet.

"Well?" she said, looking at him.

"You have my promise."

"Though you are, I know, without prejudices," she went on, "I must not leave you ignorant of the reason why that poor girl, brought back here by homesickness, left the place originally."

"A false step?"

"Oh, no!" said Véronique. "Should I offer her to you if that were so? She is the sister of a workman who died on the scaffold —"

"Ah! Tascheron," he said, "the murderer of old Pingret."

"Yes, she is the sister of a murderer," said Madame Graslin, in a bitter tone; "you are at liberty to take back your promise and —"

She did not finish, and Gérard was obliged to carry her to the bench before the chalet, where she remained unconscious for some little time. When she opened her eyes Gérard was on his knees before her and he said instantly: —

"I will marry Denise."

Madame Graslin took his head in both hands and kissed him on the forehead; then, seeing his surprise at so much gratitude, she pressed his hand and said:

"Before long you will know the secret of all this. Let us go back to the terrace, for it is late; I am very tired, but I must look my last on that dear plain."

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Though the day had been insupportably hot, the storms which during this year devastated parts of Europe and of France but respected the Limousin, had run their course in the basin of the Loire, and the atmosphere was singularly clear. The sky was so pure that the eye could seize the slightest details on the horizon. What language can render the delightful concert of busy sounds produced in the village by the return of the workers from the fields? Such a scene, to be rightly given, needs a great landscape artist and also a great painter of the human face. Is there not, by the bye, in the lassitude of Nature and that of man a curious affinity which is difficult to grasp? The depressing heat of a dog-day and the rarification of the air give to the least sound made by human beings all its signification. The women seated on their doorsteps and waiting for their husbands (who often bring back the children) gossip with each other while still at work. The roofs are casting up the lines of smoke which tell of the evening meal, the gayest among the peasantry; after which, they sleep. All actions express the tranquil cheerful thoughts of those whose day's work is over. Songs are heard very different in character from those of the morning; in this the peasants imitate the birds, whose warbling at night is totally unlike their notes at dawn. All nature sings a hymn to rest, as it sang a hymn of joy to the coming sun. The slightest movements of living beings seem tinted then with the soft, harmonious colors of the sunset cast upon the landscape and lending even to the dusty roadways a placid air. If any dared deny the influence of this hour, the loveliest of the day, the flowers would protest

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and intoxicate his senses with their penetrating perfumes, which then exhale and mingle with the tender hum of insects and the amorous note of birds.

The brooks which threaded the plain beyond the village were veiled in fleecy vapor. In the great meadows through which the high-road ran, — bordered with poplars, acacias, and ailanthus, wisely intermingled and already giving shade, — enormous and justly celebrated herds of cattle were scattered here and there, some still grazing, others ruminating. Men, women, and children were ending their day's work in the hay-field, the most picturesque of all the country toils. The night air, freshened by distant storms, brought on its wings the satisfying odors of the newly cut grass or the finished hay. Every feature of this beautiful panorama could be seen perfectly; those who feared a coming storm were finishing in haste the hay-stacks, while others followed with their pitchforks to fill the carts as they were driven along the rows. Others in the distance were still mowing, or turning the long lines of fallen grass to dry it, or hastening to pile it into cocks. The joyous laugh of the merry workers mingling with the shouts of the children tumbling each other in the hay, rose on the air. The eye could distinguish the pink, red, or blue petticoats, the kerchiefs, and the bare legs and arms of the women, all wearing broad-brimmed hats of a coarse straw, and the shirts and trousers of the men, the latter almost invariably white. The last rays of the sun were filtering through the long lines of poplars planted beside the trenches which divided the plain into meadows of unequal size, and caressing the groups of horses and

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carts, men, women, children, and cattle. The cattlemen and the shepherd-girls were beginning to collect their flocks to the sound of rustic horns.

The scene was noisy, yet silent, — a paradoxical statement, which will surprise only those to whom the character of country life is still unknown. From all sides came the carts, laden with fragrant fodder. There was something, I know not what, of torpor in the scene. Véronique walked slowly and silently between Gérard and the rector, who had joined her on the terrace.

Through the openings made by the rural lanes running down below the terrace to the main street of Montégnac Gérard and Monsieur Bonnet could see the faces of men, women, and children turned toward them; watching more particularly, no doubt, for Madame Graslin. How much of tenderness and gratitude was expressed on those faces! How many benedictions followed Véronique's footsteps! With what reverent attention were the three benefactors of a whole community regarded! Man was adding a hymn of gratitude to the other chants of evening.

While Madame Graslin walked on with her eyes fastened on the long, magnificent green pastures, her most cherished creation, the priest and the mayor did not take their eyes from the groups below, whose expression it was impossible to misinterpret; pain, sadness, and regret, mingled with hope, were plainly on all those faces. No one in Montégnac or its neighborhood was ignorant that Monsieur Roubaud had gone to Paris to bring the best physician science afforded, or that the benefactress of the whole district

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was in the last stages of a fatal illness. In all the markets through a circumference of thirty miles the peasants asked those of Montégnac, —

"How is your good woman now?"

The great vision of death hovered over the land, and dominated that rural picture. Afar, in the fields, more than one reaper sharpening his scythe, more than one young girl, her arms resting on her fork, more than one farmer stacking his hay, seeing Madame Graslin, stood mute and thoughtful, examining that noble woman, the blessing of the Corrèze, seeking some favorable sign or merely looking to admire her, impelled by a feeling that arrested their work.

"She is out walking; therefore she must be better."

These simple words were on every lip.

Madame Graslin's mother, seated on the iron bench which Véronique had formerly placed at the end of the terrace, studied every movement of her daughter; she watched her step in walking, and a few tears rolled from her eyes. Aware of the secret efforts of that superhuman courage, she knew that Véronique at that moment was suffering the tortures of a horrible agony, and only maintained herself erect by the exercise of her heroic will. The tears — they seemed almost red — which forced their way from those aged eyes, and furrowed that wrinkled face, the parchment of which seemed incapable of softening under any emotion, excited those of young Graslin, whom Monsieur Ruffin had between his knees.

"What is the matter, my boy?" said the tutor, anxiously.

"My grandmother is crying," he answered.

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Monsieur Ruffin, whose eyes were on Madame Graslin as she came toward them, now looked at Madame Sauviat, and was powerfully struck by the aspect of that old head, like that of a Roman matron, petrified with grief and moistened with tears.

"Madame, why did you not prevent her from coming out?" said the tutor to the old mother, august and sacred in her silent grief.

As Véronique advanced majestically with her naturally fine and graceful step, Madame Sauviat, driven by despair at the thought of surviving her daughter, allowed the secret of many things that awakened curiosity to escape her.

"How can she walk like that," she cried, "wearing a horrible horsehair shirt, which pricks into her skin perpetually?"

The words horrified the young man, who was not insensible to the exquisite grace of Véronique's movements; he shuddered as he thought of the constant and terrific struggle of the soul to maintain its empire thus over the body.

"She has worn it thirteen years, — ever since she ceased to nurse the boy," said the old woman. "She has done miracles here, but if her whole life were known they ought to canonize her. Since she came to Montégnac no one has ever seen her eat, and do you know why? Aline serves her three times a day a piece of dry bread, and vegetables boiled in water, without salt, on a common plate of red earth like those they feed the dogs on. Yes, that's how the woman lives who has given new life to this whole canton. She kneels to say her prayers on the edge of that hair-shirt. She says

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she could not have that smiling air you know she always has unless she practised these austerities. I tell you this," added the old woman, sinking her voice, "so that you may repeat it to the doctor Monsieur Roubaud has gone to fetch. If they could prevent my daughter from continuing these penances, perhaps they might still save her, though death has laid its hand upon her head. See for yourself! Ah! I must be strong indeed to have borne so many things these fifteen years."

The old woman took her grandson's hand and passed it over her forehead and cheeks as if the child's touch shed a healing balm there; then she kissed it with an affection the secret of which belongs to grandmothers as much as it belongs to mothers.

Véronique was now only a few feet from the bench, in company with Clousier, the rector, and Gérard. Illuminated by the glow of the setting sun, she shone with a dreadful beauty. Her yellow forehead, furrowed with long wrinkles massed one above the other like layers of clouds, revealed a fixed thought in the midst of inward troubles. Her face, devoid of all color, entirely white with the dead, greenish whiteness of plants without light, was thin, though not withered, and bore the signs of terrible physical sufferings produced by mental anguish. She fought her soul with her body, and *vice versâ*. She was so completely destroyed that she no more resembled herself than an old woman resembles her portrait as a girl. The ardent expression of her eyes declared the despotic empire exercised by a devout will over a body reduced to what religion requires it to be. In this woman the soul dragged the flesh as the Achilles of profane story dragged Hector:

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for fifteen years she dragged it victoriously along the stony paths of life around the celestial Jerusalem she hoped to enter, not by a vile deception, but with acclamation. No solitary that ever lived in the dry and arid deserts of Africa was ever more master of his senses than was Véronique in her magnificent château, among the soft, voluptuous scenery of that opulent land, beneath the protecting mantle of that rich forest, whence science, the heir of Moses' wand, had called forth plenty, prosperity, and happiness for a whole region. She contemplated the results of twelve years' patience, a work which might have made the fame of many a superior man, with a gentle modesty such as Pontorno has painted in the sublime face of his "Christian Chastity caressing the Celestial Unicorn." The mistress of the manor, whose silence was respected by her companions when they saw that her eyes were roving over those vast plains, once arid, and now fertile by her will, walked on, her arms folded, with a listant look, as if to some far horizon, on her face.

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## XX.

### THE LAST STRUGGLE.

SUDDENLY she stopped, a few feet from her mother, who looked at her as the mother of Christ must have looked at her son upon the cross. She raised her hand, and pointing to the spot where the road to Montégnac branched from the highway, she said, smiling: —

"See that carriage with four post-horses; Monsieur Roubaud is returning to us. We shall now know how many hours I have to live."

"Hours?" said Gérard.

"Did I not tell you I was taking my last walk?" she replied. "I have come here to see for the last time this glorious scene in all its splendor?" She pointed first to the village where the whole population seemed to be collected in the church square, and then to the beautiful meadows glowing in the last rays of the setting sun. "Ah!" she said, "let me see the benediction of God in the strange atmospheric condition to which we owe the safety of our harvest. Around us, on all sides, tempests, hail, lightning, have struck incessantly and pitilessly. The common people think thus, why not I? I do so need to see in this a happy augury for what awaits me after death!"

The child stood up and took his mother's hand and laid it on his head. Véronique, deeply affected by the

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action, so full of eloquence, took up her son with supernatural strength, seating him on her left arm as though he were still an infant at her breast, saying, as she kissed him: —

"Do you see that land, my son? When you are a man, continue there your mother's work."

"Madame," said the rector, in a grave voice, "a few strong and privileged beings are able to contemplate their coming death face to face, to fight, as it were, a duel with it, and to display a courage and an ability which challenge admiration. You show us this terrible spectacle; but perhaps you have too little pity for us; leave us at least the hope that you may be mistaken, and that God will allow you to finish that which you have begun"

"All I have done is through you, my friends," she said. "I have been useful, I can be so no longer. All is fruitful around us now; nothing is barren and desolated here except my heart. You well know, my dear rector, that I can only find peace and pardon *there*."

She stretched her hand toward the cemetery. Never had she said as much since the day of her arrival, when she was taken with sudden illness at the same spot. The rector looked attentively at his penitent, and the habit of penetration he had long acquired made him see that in those simple words he had won another triumph. Véronique must have made a mighty effort over herself to break her twelve years' silence with a speech that said so much. The rector clasped his hands with a fervent gesture that was natural to him as he looked with deep emotion at the members of this family whose secrets had passed into his heart.

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Gérard, to whom the words "peace and pardon" must have seemed strange, was bewildered. Monsieur Ruffin, with his eyes fixed on Véronique, was stupefied. At this instant the carriage came rapidly up the avenue.

"There are five of them!" cried the rector, who could see and count the travellers.

"Five!" exclaimed Gérard. "Can five know more than two?"

"Ah," cried Madame Graslin suddenly, grasping the rector's arm, "the *procureur-général* is among them! What is he doing here?"

"And papa Grossetête, too!" cried Francis.

"Madame," said the rector, supporting Véronique, and leading her apart a few steps, "show courage; be worthy of yourself."

"But what can he want?" she replied, leaning on the balustrade. "Mother!" (The old woman ran to her daughter with an activity that belied her years.) "I shall see him again," she said.

"As he comes with Monsieur Grossetête," said the rector, "he can have none but good intentions."

"Ah! monsieur, my child will die!" cried Madame Sauviat, seeing the effect of the rector's words on her daughter's face. "How can her heart survive such emotions? Monsieur Grossetête has always hitherto prevented that man from seeing Véronique."

Madame Graslin's face was on fire.

"Do you hate him so much?" said the Abbé Bonnet.

"She left Limoges to escape the sight of him, and to escape letting the whole town into her secrets," said Madame Sauviat, terrified at the change she saw on Madame Graslin's distorted features.

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"Do you not see that he will poison my few remaining hours? When I ought to be thinking of heaven he will nail me to earth," cried Véronique.

The rector took her arm and constrained her to walk aside with him. When they were alone he stopped and gave her one of those angelic looks with which he was able to calm the violent convulsions of the soul.

"If it is really so," he said, "as your confessor, I order you to receive him, to be kind and affectionate to him, to quit that garment of wrath, and forgive him as God will forgive you. Can there still be the remains of passion in a soul I believed to be purified. Burn this last incense on the altar of your penitence, or else your repentance is a lie."

"There was still that effort to make — and it is made," she answered, wiping her eyes. "The devil lurked in that last fold of my heart, and God, no doubt, put into Monsieur de Grandville's mind the thought that brings him here. Ah! how many times must God still strike me?" she cried.

She stopped, as if to say a mental prayer; then she returned to Madame Sauviat and said in a low voice:

"My dear mother, be kind and gentle to Monsieur de Grandville."

The old woman clasped her hands with a feverish shudder.

"There is no longer any hope," she said, seizing the rector's hand.

The carriage, announced by the postilion's whip, was now coming up the last slope; the gates were opened, it entered the courtyard, and the travellers came at once to the terrace. They were the illustrious Archbishop

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Dutheil, who was on his way to consecrate Monseigneur Gabriel de Rastignac, the *procureur-général*, Monsieur de Grandville, Monsieur Grossetête, Monsieur Roubaud, and one of the most celebrated physicians in Paris, Horace Bianchon.

"You are very welcome," said Véronique, advancing toward them, — "you particularly," she added, offering her hand to Monsieur de Grandville, who took it and pressed it.

"I counted on the intervention of Monseigneur and on that of my friend Monsieur Grossetête to obtain for me a favorable reception," said the *procureur-général.* "It would have been a life-long regret to me if I did not see you again."

"I thank those who brought you here," replied Véronique, looking at the Comte de Grandville for the first time in fifteen years. "I have felt averse to you for a very long time, but I now recognize the injustice of my feelings; and you shall know why, if you can stay till the day after to-morrow at Montégnac." Then turning to Horace Bianchon and bowing to him, she added: "Monsieur will no doubt confirm my apprehensions. God must have sent you, Monseigneur," she said, turning to the archbishop. "In memory of our old friendship you will not refuse to assist me in my last moments. By whose mercy is it that I have about me all the beings who have loved and supported me in life?"

As she said the word *loved* she turned with a gracious look to Monsieur de Grandville, who was touched to tears by this mark of feeling. Silence fell for a few moments on every one. The doctors wondered by

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what occult power this woman could still keep her feet, suffering as she must have suffered. The other three men were so shocked at the ravages disease had suddenly made in her that they communicated their thoughts by their eyes only.

"Allow me," she said, with her accustomed grace, "to leave you now with these gentlemen; the matter is urgent."

She bowed to her guests, gave an arm to each of the doctors, and walked toward the château feebly and slowly, with a difficulty which told only too plainly of the coming catastrophe.

"Monsieur Bonnet," said the archbishop, looking at the rector, "you have accomplished a miracle."

"Not I, but God, Monseigneur," he replied.

"They said she was dying," said Monsieur Grossetête, "but she is dead; there is nothing left of her but spirit."

"A soul," said Gérard.

"And yet she is still the same," cried the *procureur-général.*

"A stoic after the manner of the Porch philosophers," said the tutor.

They walked in silence the whole length of the balustrade, looking at the landscape still red with the declining light.

"To me who saw this scene thirteen years ago," said the archbishop, pointing to the fertile plain, the valley, and the mountains of Montégnac, "this miracle is as extraordinary as that we have just witnessed. But how comes it that you allow Madame Graslin to walk about? She ought to be in her bed."



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"She was there," said Madame Sauviat; "for ten days she did not leave it; but to-day she insisted on getting up to take a last look at the landscape."

"I can understand that she wanted to bid farewell to her great creation," said Monsieur de Grandville; "but she risked expiring on this terrace."

"Monsieur Roubaud told us not to thwart her," said Madame Sauviat.

"What a stupendous work! what a miracle has been accomplished!" said the archbishop, whose eyes were roving over the scene before him. "She has literally sown the desert! But we know, monsieur," he added, turning to Gérard, "that your scientific knowledge and your labors have a large share in it."

"They have been only the workmen," replied the mayor. "Yes, the hands only; she has been the thought."

Madame Sauviat here left the group, to hear, if possible, the decision of the doctors.

"We need some heroism ourselves," said Monsieur de Grandville to the rector and the archbishop, "to enable us to witness this death."

"Yes," said Monsieur Grossetête, who overheard him, "but we ought to do much for such a friend."

After several turns up and down the terrace, these persons, full of solemn thoughts, saw two farmers approaching them, sent as a deputation from the village, where the inhabitants were in a state of painful anxiety to know the sentence pronounced by the physician from Paris.

"They are still consulting, and as yet we know nothing, my friends," said the archbishop.

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As he spoke, Monsieur Roubaud appeared coming toward them, and they all hurried to meet him.

"Well?" said the mayor.

"She cannot live forty-eight hours longer," replied Monsieur Roubaud. "During my absence the disease has fully developed; Monsieur Bianchon does not understand how it was possible for her to have walked. Such phenomenal exhibitions of strength are always caused by great mental exaltation. So, gentlemen," said the doctor to the priests, "she belongs to you now; science is useless, and my illustrious fellow-physician thinks you have barely time enough for your last offices."

"Let us go now and say the prayers for the forty hours," said the rector to his parishioners, turning to leave the terrace. "His Grace will doubtless administer the last sacraments."

The archbishop bowed his head; he could not speak; his eyes were full of tears. Every one sat down, or leaned against the balustrade, absorbed in his own thought. The church bells presently sent forth a few sad calls, and then the whole population were seen hurrying toward the porch. The gleam of the lighted tapers shone through the trees in Monsieur Bonnet's garden; the chants resounded. No color was left in the landscape but the dull red hue of the dusk; even the birds had hushed their songs; the tree-frog alone sent forth its long, clear, melancholy note.

"I will go and do my duty," said the archbishop, turning away with a slow step like a man overcome with emotion.

The consultation had taken place in the great salon

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of the château. This vast room communicated with a state bedchamber, furnished in red damask, in which Graslin had displayed a certain opulent magnificence. Véronique had not entered it six times in fourteen years; the grand apartments were quite useless to her, and she never received her friends there. But now the effort she had made to accomplish her last obligation, and to overcome her last repugnance had exhausted her strength, and she was wholly unable to mount the stairs to her own rooms.

When the illustrious physician had taken the patient's hand and felt her pulse he looked at Monsieur Roubaud and made him a sign; then together they lifted her and carried her into the chamber. Aline hastily opened the doors. Like all state beds the one in this room had no sheets, and the two doctors laid Madame Graslin on the damask coverlet. Roubaud opened the windows, pushed back the outer blinds, and called. The servants and Madame Sauviat went in. The tapers in the candelabra were lighted.

"It is ordained," said the dying woman, smiling, "that my death shall be what that of a Christian should be — a festival!"

During the consultation she said: —

"The *procureur-général* has done his professional duty; I was going, and he has pushed me on."

The old mother looked at her and laid a finger on her lips.

"Mother, I shall speak," replied Véronique. "See! the hand of God is in all this: I am dying in a red room —"

Madame Sauviat went out, unable to bear those words.

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"Aline," she said, "she will speak! she will speak!"

"Ah! madame is out of her mind," cried the faithful maid, who was bringing sheets. "Fetch the rector, madame."

"Your mistress must be undressed," said Bianchon to the maid.

"It will be very difficult to do it, monsieur; madame is wrapped in a hair-cloth garment."

"What! in the nineteenth century can such horrors be revived?" said the great doctor.

"Madame Graslin has never allowed me to touch her stomach," said Roubaud. "I have been able to judge of the progress of the disease only from her face and her pulse, and the little information I could get from her mother and the maid."

Véronique was now placed on a sofa while the bed was being made. The doctors spoke together in a low voice. Madame Sauviat and Aline made the bed. The faces of the two women were full of anguish; their hearts were wrung by the thought, "We are making her bed for the last time — she will die here!"

The consultation was not long. But Bianchon exacted at the outset that Aline should, in spite of the patient's resistance, cut off the hair shirt and put on a night-dress. The doctors returned to the salon while this was being done. When Aline passed them carrying the instrument of torture wrapped in a napkin, she said: —

"Madame's body is one great wound."

The doctors returned to the bedroom.

"Your will is stronger than that of Napoleon,

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madame," said Bianchon, after asking a few questions, to which Véronique replied very clearly. "You keep your mind and your faculties in the last stages of a disease which robbed the Emperor of his brilliant intellect. From what I know of you I think I ought to tell you the truth."

"I implore you to do so," she said. "You are able to estimate what strength remains to me; and I have need of all my vigor for a few hours."

"Think only of your salvation," replied Bianchon.

"If God has given me grace to die in possession of all my faculties," she said with a celestial smile, "be sure that this favor will be used to the glory of his Church. The possession of my mind and senses is necessary to fulfil a command of God, whereas Napoleon had accomplished all his destiny."

The doctors looked at each other in astonishment at hearing these words, said with as much ease as though Madame Graslin were still presiding in her salon.

"Ah! here is the doctor who is to cure me," she said presently, when the archbishop, summoned by Roubaud, entered the room.

She collected all her strength and rose to a sitting posture, in order to bow graciously to Monsieur Bianchon, and beg him to accept something else than money for the good news he gave her. She said a few words in her mother's ear, and Madame Sauviat immediately led away the doctors; then Véronique requested the archbishop to postpone their interview till the rector could come to her, expressing a wish to rest for a while. Aline watched beside her.

At midnight Madame Graslin awoke, and asked for

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the archbishop and rector, whom Aline silently showed her close at hand, praying for her. She made a sign dismissing her mother and the maid, and, at another sign, the two priests came to the bedside.

"Monseigneur, and you, my dear rector," she said, "will hear nothing you do not already know. You were the first, Monseigneur, to cast your eyes into my inner self; you read there nearly all my past; and what you read sufficed you. My confessor, that guardian angel whom heaven placed near me, knows more; I have told him all. You, whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of the Church, I wish to consult you as to the manner in which I ought as a true Christian to leave this life. You, austere and saintly spirits, think you that if God deigns to pardon one whose repentance is the deepest, the most absolute, that ever shook a human soul, think you that even then I have made my full expiation here below?"

"Yes," said the archbishop; "yes, my daughter."

"No, my father, no!" she said rising in her bed, the lightning flashing from her eyes. "Not far from here there is a grave, where an unhappy man is lying beneath the weight of a dreadful crime; here in this sumptuous home is a woman, crowned with the fame of benevolence and virtue. This woman is blessed; that poor young man is cursed. The criminal is covered with obloquy; I receive the respect of all. I had the largest share in the sin; he has a share, a large share in the good which has won for me such glory and such gratitude. Fraud that I am, I have the honor; he, martyr to his loyalty, has the shame. I shall die in a few hours, and the canton will mourn me;

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the whole department will ring with my good deeds, my piety, my virtue; but he died covered with insults, in sight of a whole population rushing, with hatred to a murderer, to see him die. You, my judges, you are indulgent to me; yet I hear within myself an imperious voice which will not let me rest. Ah! the hand of God, less tender than yours, strikes me from day to day, as if to warn me that all is not expiated. My sins cannot be redeemed except by a public confession. He is happy! criminal, he gave his life with ignominy in face of earth and heaven; and I, I cheat the world as I cheated human justice. The homage I receive humiliates me; praise sears my heart. Do you not see, in the very coming of the *procureur-général*, a command from heaven echoing the voice in my own soul which cries to me: Confess!"

The two priests, the prince of the Church as well as the humble rector, these two great lights, each in his own way, stood with their eyes lowered and were silent. Deeply moved by the grandeur and the resignation of the guilty woman, the judges could not pronounce her sentence.

"My child," said the archbishop at last, raising his noble head, macerated by the customs of his austere life, "you are going beyond the commandments of the Church. The glory of the Church is to make her dogma conform to the habits and manners of each age; for the Church goes on from age to age in company with humanity. According to her present decision secret confession has taken the place of public confession. This substitution has made the new law. The sufferings you have endured suffice. Die in peace: God has heard you."

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"But is not this desire of a guilty woman in conformity with the law of the first Church, which has enriched heaven with as many saints and martyrs and confessing souls as there are stars in the firmament?" persisted Véronique, vehemently. "Who said: *Confess yourselves one to another?* Was it not the disciples, who lived with the Saviour? Let me confess my shame publicly on my knees. It will redeem my sin to the world, to that family exiled and almost extinct through me. The world ought to know that my benefactions are not an offering, but the payment of a debt. Suppose that later, after my death, something tore from my memory the lying veil which covers me. Ah! that idea is more than I can bear, it is death indeed!"

"I see in this too much of calculation, my child." said the archbishop, gravely. "Passions are still too strong in you; the one I thought extinct is —"

"Oh! I swear to you, Monseigneur," she said, interrupting the prelate and fixing her eyes, full of horror, upon him, "my heart is as purified as that of a guilty and repentant woman can be; there is nothing now within me but the thought of God."

"Monseigneur," said the rector in a tender voice, "let us leave celestial justice to take its course. It is now four years since I have strongly opposed this wish; it is the only difference that has ever come between my penitent and myself. I have seen to the depths of that soul, and I know this earth has no longer any hold there. Though the tears, the remorse, the contrition of fifteen years relate to the mutual sin of those two persons, believe me there are no remains of earthly passion in this long and terrible bewailing. Memory

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no longer mingles its flames with those of an ardent penitence. Yes, tears have at last extinguished that great fire. I guarantee," he said, stretching his hand over Madame Graslin's head, and letting his moistened eyes be seen, "I guarantee the purity of that angelic soul. And also I see in this desire the thought of reparation to an absent family, a member of which God has brought back here by one of those events which reveal His providence."

Véronique took the trembling hand of the rector and kissed it.

"You have often been very stern to me, dear pastor, but at this moment I see where you keep your apostolic gentleness. You," she said, looking at the archbishop, "you, the supreme head of this corner of God's kingdom, be to me, in this moment of ignominy, a support. I must bow down as the lowest of women, but you will lift me up pardoned and — possibly — the equal of those who never sinned."

The archbishop was silent, weighing no doubt all the considerations his practised eye perceived.

"Monseigneur," said the rector, "religion has had some heavy blows. This return to ancient customs, brought about by the greatness of the sin and its repentance, may it not be a triumph we have no right to refuse?"

"But they will say we are fanatics! They will declare we have exacted this cruel scene!"

And again the archbishop was silent and thoughtful.

At this moment Horace Bianchon and Rouband entered the room, after knocking. As the door opened Véronique saw her mother, her son, and all the servants

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of the household on their knees praying. The rectors of the two adjacent parishes had come to assist Monsieur Bonnet, and also, perhaps, to pay their respects to the great prelate, for whom the French clergy now desired the honors of the cardinalate, hoping that the clearness of his intellect, which was thoroughly Gallican, would enlighten the Sacred College.

Horace Bianchon returned to Paris; before departing, he came to bid farewell to the dying woman and thank her for her munificence. Slowly he approached, perceiving from the faces of the priests that the wounds of the soul had been the determining cause of those of the body. He took Madame Graslin's hand, laid it on the bed and felt the pulse. The deep silence, that of a summer night in a country solitude, gave additional solemnity to the scene. The great salon, seen through the double doors, was lighted up for the little company of persons who were praying there; all were on their knees except the two priests who were seated and reading their breviaries. On either side of the grand state bed were the prelate in his violet robes, the rector, and the two physicians.

"She is agitated almost unto death," said Horace Bianchon, who, like all men of great talent, sometimes used speech as grand as the occasion that called it forth.

The archbishop rose as if some inward impulse drove him; he called to Monsieur Bonnet, and together they crossed the room, passed through the salon, and went out upon the terrace, where they walked up and down for some moments. When they returned, after discussing this case of ecclesiastical discipline, Roubaud met them.

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"Monsieur Bianchon sends me to hasten you. Madame Graslin is dying of an agitation which has nothing to do with her physical condition."

The archbishop hastened his step, and as he entered the bedroom he said to Madame Graslin, who looked at him anxiously: —

"You shall do as you wish."

Bianchon was holding the patient's pulse; an exclamation of surprise escaped him; giving a glance to Roubaud and the two priests he said: —

"Monseigneur, this body is no longer within our domain; your word has given life where already there was death. You make me believe in miracles."

"Madame has long been all soul and only soul," said Roubaud. Véronique thanked him with a glance.

A smile which revealed her happiness at the certainty of complete expiation gave back to Véronique's face the look of innocence she had worn when a girl. All the agitations inscribed there in cruel wrinkles, discolored shadows, livid marks, all the details which had made that head so horribly beautiful when it pictured anguish only, in short, all changes that life had made there, vanished; it seemed to her friends here present as though she had worn a mask until that moment, and now the mask had fallen. For the last time that wonderful phenomenon by which the face of this woman expressed her life and her hidden emotions was seen to take place. All within her grew pure, grew bright; there shone upon her face, as it were the reflection of the flaming swords of guardian angels who surrounded her. She was once more what she was when all Limoges had called her beautiful, but with this

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difference, — the love of God was more powerful than ever guilty love had been; the one had brought into action the powers of life, the other lifted her above all the weaknesses of death. A smothered cry was heard; her mother bounded to the bed.

"I see my child again!" she said.

The expression of that old woman as she said the words *my child* recalled so vividly the innocence of childhood that those around that deathbed turned aside to hide their tears.

The illustrious doctor took Madame Graslin's hand and kissed it. Presently the wheels of his carriage echoing in the silence told to the whole community that there was no hope of still preserving her who was the soul and spirit of this corner of the earth. The archbishop, the rector, the doctor, and all who were weary, went to take some rest after Madame Graslin herself had fallen asleep. She slept for several hours, but woke at dawn, and asked to have the windows opened. She wished, she said, to see the rising of her last sun.

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## XXI.

### CONFESSION AT THE GATES OF THE TOMB.

At ten o'clock in the morning the archbishop, wearing his pontifical robes, came into Madame Graslin's chamber. The prelate, as well as the rector, had such confidence in this woman that they gave her no advice or instructions as to the limits within which she ought to make her confession.

Véronique now saw an assemblage of clergy from all the neighboring districts. Monseigneur was assisted by four vicars. The magnificent vessels she had bestowed upon her dear parish church were brought to the house and gave splendor to the ceremony. Eight choristers in their white and red surplices stood in two rows from the bed to the door of the salon, each holding one of the large bronze-gilt candelabra which Véronique had ordered from Paris. The cross and the church banner were held on either side the bed by white-haired sacristans. Thanks to the devotion of her servants, a wooden altar brought from the sacristy had been erected close to the door of the salon, and so prepared and decorated that Monseigneur could say mass upon it.

Madame Graslin was deeply touched by these attentions, which the Church, as a general thing, grants only to royal personages. The folding doors between the salon and the dining-room were open, and she could see

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a vista of the ground-floor rooms filled with the village population. Her friends had thought of everything; the salon was occupied exclusively by themselves and the servants of the household. In the front rank and grouped before the door of the bedroom were her nearest friends, those on whose discretion reliance could be placed. MM. Grossetête, de Granville, Roubaud, Gérard, Clousier, Ruffin, took the first places. They had arranged among themselves that they should rise and stand in a group, thus preventing the words of the repentant woman from being heard in the farther rooms; but their tears and sobs would, in any case, have drowned her voice.

At this moment and before all else in that audience, two persons presented, to an observer, a powerfully affecting sight. One was Denise Tascheron. Her foreign garments, of Quaker simplicity, made her unrecognizable by her former village acquaintance. The other was quite another personage, an acquaintance not to be forgotten, and his apparition there was like a streak of lurid light. The *procureur-général* came suddenly to a perception of the truth; the part that he had played to Madame Graslin unrolled itself before him; he divined it to its fullest extent. Less influenced, as a son of the nineteenth century, by the religious aspect of the matter, Monsieur de Grandville's heart was filled with an awful dread; for he saw before him, he contemplated the drama of that woman's hidden self at the hôtel Graslin during the trial of Jean-François Tascheron. That tragic period came back distinctly to his memory, — lighted even now by the mother's eyes, shining with hatred, which fell upon him

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where he stood, like drops of molten lead. That old woman, standing ten feet from him, forgave nothing. That man, representing human justice, trembled. Pale, struck to the heart, he dared not cast his eyes upon the bed where lay the woman he had loved so well, now livid beneath the hand of death, gathering strength to conquer agony from the greatness of her sin and its repentance. The mere sight of Véronique's thin profile, sharply defined in white upon the crimson damask, caused him a vertigo.

At eleven o'clock the mass began. After the epistle had been read by the rector of Vizay the archbishop removed his dalmatic and advanced to the threshold of the bedroom door.

"Christians, gathered here to assist in the ceremony of extreme unction which we are about to administer to the mistress of this house," he said, "you who join your prayers to those of the Church and intercede with God to obtain from Him her eternal salvation, you are now to learn that she does not feel herself worthy, in this, her last hour, to receive the holy viaticum without having made, for the edification of her fellows, a public confession of the greatest of her sins. We have resisted her pious wish, although this act of contrition was long in use during the early ages of Christianity. But, as this poor woman tells us that her confession may serve to rehabilitate an unfortunate son of this parish, we leave her free to follow the inspirations of her repentance."

After these words, said with pastoral unction and dignity, the archbishop turned aside to give place to Véronique. The dying woman came forward, sup-

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ported by her old mother and the rector, — the mother from whom she derived her body, the Church, the spiritual mother of her soul. She knelt down on a cushion, clasped her hands, and seemed to collect herself for a few moments, as if to gather from some source descending from heaven the power to speak. At this moment the silence was almost terrifying. None dared look at their neighbor. All eyes were lowered. And yet the eyes of Véronique, when she raised them, encountered those of the *procureur-général*, and the expression on that blanched face brought the color to hers.

"I could not die in peace," said Véronique, in a voice of deep emotion, "if I suffered the false impression you all have of me to remain. You see in me a guilty woman, who asks your prayers, and who seeks to make herself worthy of pardon by this public confession of her sin. That sin was so great, its consequences were so fatal, that perhaps no penance can atone for it. But the more humiliation I submit to here on earth, the less I may have to dread the wrath of God in the heavenly kingdom to which I am going. My father, who had great confidence in me, commended to my care (now twenty years ago) a son of this parish, in whom he had seen a great desire to improve himself, an aptitude for study, and fine characteristics. I mean the unfortunate Jean-François Tascheron, who thenceforth attached himself to me as his benefactress. How did the affection I felt for him become a guilty one? I think myself excused from explaining this. Perhaps it could be shown that the purest sentiments by which we act in this world were insensibly diverted from



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their course by untold sacrifices, by reasons arising from our human frailty, by many causes which might appear to diminish the evil of my sin. But even if the noblest affections moved me, was I less guilty? Rather let me confess that I, who by education, by position in the world, might consider myself superior to the youth my father confided to me, and from whom I was separated by the natural delicacy of our sex, — I listened, fatally, to the promptings of the devil. I soon found myself too much the mother of that young man to be insensible to his mute and delicate admiration. He alone, he first, recognized my true value. But perhaps a horrible calculation entered my mind. I thought how discreet a youth would be who owed his all to me, and whom the chances of life had put so far away from me, though we were born equals. I made even my reputation for benevolence, my pious occupations, a cloak to screen my conduct. Alas! — and this is doubtless one of my greatest sins — I hid my passion under cover of the altar. The most virtuous of my actions — the love I bore my mother, the acts of devotion which were sincere and true in the midst of my wrong-doing — all, all were made to serve the ends of a desperate passion, and were links in the chain that held me. My poor beloved mother, who hears me now, was for a long time, ignorantly, an accomplice in my sin. When her eyes were opened, too many dangerous facts existed not to give her mother's heart the strength to be silent. Silence with her has been the highest virtue. Her love for her daughter has gone beyond her love to God. Ah! I here discharge her solemnly from the heavy burden of secrecy which she has borne.

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She shall end her days without compelling either eyes or brow to lie. Let her motherhood stand clear of blame; let that noble, sacred old age, crowned with virtue, shine with its natural lustre, freed of that link which bound her indirectly to infamy!"

Tears checked the dying woman's voice for an instant; Aline gave her salts to inhale.

"There is no one who has not been better to me than I deserve," she went on, — "even the devoted servant who does me this last service; she has feigned ignorance of what she knew, but at least she was in the secret of the penances by which I have destroyed the flesh that sinned. I here beg pardon of the world for the long deception to which I have been led by the terrible logic of society. Jean-François Tascheron was not as guilty as he seemed. Ah! you who hear me, I implore you to remember his youth, and the madness excited in him partly by the remorse that seized upon me, partly by involuntary seductions. More than that! it was a sense of honor, though a mistaken honor, which caused the most awful of these evils. Neither of us could endure our perpetual deceit. He appealed, unhappy man, to my own right feeling; he sought to make our fatal love as little wounding to others as it could be. We meant to hide ourselves away forever. Thus I was the cause, the sole cause, of his crime. Driven by necessity, the unhappy man, guilty of too much devotion to an idol, chose from all evil acts the one which might be hereafter reparable. I knew nothing of it till the moment of execution. At that moment the hand of God threw down that scaffolding of false contrivances. — I heard the cries; they echo in

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my ears! I divined the struggle, which I could not stop, — I, the cause of it! Tascheron was maddened; I swear it."

Here Véronique turned her eyes on Monsieur de Grandville, and a sob was heard to issue from Denise Tascheron's breast.

"He lost his mind when he saw what he thought his happiness destroyed by unforeseen circumstances. The unhappy man, misled by his love, went headlong from a delinquent act to crime — from robbery to a double murder. He left my mother's house an innocent man, he returned a guilty one. I alone knew that there was neither premeditation nor any of the aggravating circumstances on which he was sentenced to death. A hundred times I thought of betraying myself to save him; a hundred times a horrible and necessary restraint stopped the words upon my lips. Undoubtedly, my presence near the scene had contributed to give him the odious, infamous, ignoble courage of a murderer. Were it not for me, he would have fled. I had formed that soul, trained that mind, enlarged that heart; I knew it; he was incapable of cowardice or meanness. Do justice to that involuntarily guilty arm, do justice to him, whom God, in his mercy, has allowed to sleep in his quiet grave, where you have wept for him, suspecting, it may be, the extenuating truth. Punish, curse the guilty creature before you! Horrified by the crime when once committed, I did my best to hide my share in it. Trusted by my father — I, who was childless — to lead a child to God, I led him to the scaffold! Ah! punish me, curse me, the hour has come!"

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Saying these words, her eyes shone with the stoic pride of a savage. The archbishop standing behind her, and as if protecting her with the pastoral cross, abandoned his impassible demeanor and covered his eyes with his right hand. A muffled cry was heard, as though some one were dying. Two persons, Gérard and Roubaud, received and carried away in their arms, Denise Tascheron, unconscious. That sight seemed for an instant to quench the fire in Véronique's eyes; she was evidently uneasy; but soon her self-control and serenity of martyrdom resumed their sway.

"You now know," she continued, "that I deserve neither praise nor blessing for my conduct here. I have led in sight of Heaven, a secret life of bitter penance which Heaven will estimate. My life before men has been an immense reparation for the evils I have caused; I have marked my repentance ineffaceably on the earth; it will last almost eternally here below. It is written on those fertile fields, in the prosperous village, in the rivulets brought from the mountains to water the plain once barren and fruitless, now green and fertile. Not a tree will be cut for a hundred years to come but the people of this region will know of the remorse that made it grow. My repentant soul will still live here among you. What you will owe to its efforts, to a fortune honorably acquired, is the heritage of its repentance, — the repentance of her who caused the crime. All has been repaired so far as society is concerned; but I am still responsible for that life, crushed in its bud, — a life confided to me and for which I am now required to render an account."

The flame of her eyes was veiled in tears.

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"There is here, before me, a man," she continued "who, because he did his duty strictly, has been to me an object of hatred which I thought eternal. He was the first inflictor of my punishment. My feet were still too deep in blood, I was too near the deed, not to hate justice. So long as that root of anger lay in my heart, I knew there was still a lingering remnant of condemnable passion. I had nothing to forgive that man, I have only had to purify that corner of my heart where Evil lurked. However hard it may have been to win that victory, it is won."

Monsieur de Grandville turned a face to Véronique that was bathed in tears. Human justice seemed at that moment to feel remorse. When the confessing woman raised her head as if to continue, she met the agonizing look of the old man Grossetête, who stretched his supplicating hands to her as if to say, "Enough, enough!" At the same instant a sound of tears and sobs was heard. Moved by such sympathy, unable to bear the balm of this general pardon, she was seized with faintness. Seeing that her daughter's vital force was gone at last, the old mother summoned the vigor of her youth to carry her away.

"Christians," said the archbishop, "you have heard the confession of that penitent woman; it confirms the sentence of human justice. You ought to see in this fresh reason to join your prayers to those of the Church which offers to God the holy sacrifice of the mass, to implore his mercy in favor of so deep a repentance."

The services went on. Véronique, lying on the bed, followed them with a look of such inward contentment that she seemed, to every eye, no longer the same

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woman. On her face was the candid and virtuous expression of the pure young girl such as she had been in her parents' home. The dawn of eternal life was already whitening her brow and glorifying her face with its celestial tints. Doubtless she heard the mystic harmonies, and gathered strength to live from her desire to unite herself once more with God in the last communion. The rector came beside the bed and gave her absolution. The archbishop administered the sacred oils with a fatherly tenderness that showed to all there present how dear the lost but now recovered lamb had been to him. Then, with the sacred anointing, he closed to the things of earth those eyes which had done such evil, and laid the seal of the Church upon the lips that were once too eloquent. The ears, by which so many evil inspirations had penetrated her mind, were closed forever. All the senses, deadened by repentance, were thus sanctified, and the spirit of evil could have no further power within her soul.

Never did assistants of this ceremony more fully understand the grandeur and profundity of the sacrament than those who now saw the acts of the Church justly following the confession of that dying woman.

Thus prepared, Véronique received the body of Jesus Christ with an expression of hope and joy which melted the ice of unbelief against which the rector had so often bruised himself. Roubaud, confounded in all his opinions, became a Catholic on the spot. The scene was touching and yet awesome; the solemnity of its every feature was so great that painters might have found there the subject of a masterpiece.

When this funereal part was over, and the dying

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woman heard the priests begin the reading of the gospel of Saint John, she signed to her mother to bring her son, who had been taken from the room by his tutor. When she saw Francis kneeling by the bedside the pardoned mother felt she had the right to lay her hand upon his head and bless him. Doing so, she died.

Old Madame Sauviat was there, at her post, erect as she had been for twenty years. This woman, heroic after her fashion, closed her daughter's eyes — those eyes that had wept so much — and kissed them. All the priests, followed by the choristers, surrounded the bed. By the flaming light of the torches they chanted the terrible *De Profundis*, the echoes of which told the population kneeling before the château, the friends praying in the salon, the servants in the adjoining rooms, that the mother of the canton was dead. The hymn was accompanied with moans and tears. The confession of that grand woman had not been audible beyond the threshold of the salon, and none but loving ears had heard it.

When the peasants of the neighborhood, joining with those of Montégnac, came, one by one, to lay upon their benefactress the customary palm, together with their last farewell mingled with prayers and tears, they saw the man of justice, crushed by grief, holding the hand of the woman whom, without intending it, he had so cruelly but so justly stricken.

Two days later the *procureur général*, Grossetête, the archbishop, and the mayor, holding the corners of the black pall, conducted the body of Madame Graslin to its last resting-place. It was laid in the grave in

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deep silence; not a word was said; no one had strength to speak; all eyes were full of tears. "She is now a saint!" was said by the peasants as they went away along the roads of the canton to which she had given prosperity, — saying the words to her creations as though they were animate beings.

No one thought it strange that Madame Graslin was buried beside the body of Jean-François Tascheron. She had not asked it; but the old mother, as the last act of her tender pity, had requested the sexton to make the grave there, — putting together those whom earth had so violently parted, and whose souls were now reunited through repentance in purgatory.

Madame Graslin's will was found to be all that was expected of it. She founded scholarships and hospital beds at Limoges solely for working-men; she assigned a considerable sum — three hundred thousand francs in six years — for the purchase of that part of the village called Les Tascherons, where she directed that a hospital should be built. This hospital, intended for the indigent old persons of the canton, for the sick, for lying-in women if paupers, and for foundlings, was to be called the Tascheron Hospital. Véronique ordered it to be placed in charge of the Gray Sisters, and fixed the salaries of the surgeon and the physician at four thousand francs for each. She requested Roubaud to be the first physician of this hospital, placing upon him the choice of the surgeon, and requesting him to superintend the erection of the building with reference to sanitary arrangements, conjointly with Gérard, who was to be the architect. She also gave to the village of Montégnac an extent of pasture land sufficient to

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pay all its taxes. The church, she endowed with a fund to be used for a special purpose, namely: watch was to be kept over young workmen, and cases discovered in which some village youth might show a disposition for art, or science, or manufactures; the interest of the fund was then to be used in fostering it. The intelligent benevolence of the testatrix named the sum that should be taken for each of these encouragements.

The news of Madame Graslin's death, received throughout the department as a calamity, was not accompanied by any rumor injurious to the memory of this woman. This discretion was a homage rendered to so many virtues by the hard-working Catholic population, which renewed in this remote corner of France the miracles of the "Lettres Édifiantes."

Gérard, appointed guardian of Francis Graslin, and obliged, by the terms of the will, to reside at the château, moved there. But he did not marry Denise Tascheron until three months after Véronique's death. In her, Francis found a second mother.

THE END.

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*THE COMEDY OF HUMAN LIFE*

By H. DE BALZAC

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SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE

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# SONS OF THE SOIL

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A. P. Laurens

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Procédé Goupil

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*"Mouche presently appeared."*

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## TO MONSIEUR P. S. B. GAVAULT.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU wrote these words at the beginning of his Nouvelle Héloïse: "I have seen the morals of my time and I publish these letters." May I not say to you, in imitation of that great writer, "I have studied the march of my epoch and I publish this work"?

The object of this particular study — startling in its truth so long as society makes philanthropy a principle instead of regarding it as an accident — is to bring to sight the leading characters of a class too long unheeded by the pens of writers who seek novelty as their chief object. Perhaps this forgetfulness is only prudence in these days when the people are heirs of all the sycophants of royalty. We make criminals poetic, we commiserate the hangman, we have all but deified the proletary. Sects have risen, and cried by every pen, "Arise, working-men!" just as formerly they cried, "Arise!" to the *tiers état*. None of these Erostrates, however, have dared to face the country solitudes and study the unceasing conspiracy of those whom we term

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weak against those others who fancy themselves strong, — that of the peasant against the proprietor. It is necessary to enlighten not only the legislator of to-day but him of to-morrow. In the midst of the present democratic ferment, into which so many of our writers blindly rush, it becomes an urgent duty to exhibit the peasant who renders Law inapplicable, and who has made the ownership of land to be a thing that is, and that is not.

You are now to behold that indefatigable mole, that rodent which undermines and disintegrates the soil, parcels it out and divides an acre into a hundred fragments, — ever spurred on to his banquet by the lower middle classes who make him at once their auxiliary and their prey. This essentially unsocial element, created by the Revolution, will some day absorb the middle classes, just as the middle classes have destroyed the nobility. Lifted above the law by its own insignificance, this Robespierre, with one head and twenty million arms, is at work perpetually; crouching in country districts, intrenched in municipal councils, under arms in the national guard of every canton in France, — one result of the year 1830, which failed to remember that Napoleon preferred the chances of defeat to the danger of arming the masses.

If during the last eight years I have again and again given up the writing of this book (the most important of those I have undertaken to write), and as often re-

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turned to it, it was, as you and other friends can well imagine, because my courage shrank from the many difficulties, the many essential details of a drama so doubly dreadful and so cruelly bloody. Among the reasons which render me now almost, it may be thought, foolhardy, I count the desire to finish a work long designed to be to you a proof of my deep and lasting gratitude for a friendship that has ever been among my greatest consolations in misfortune.

DE BALZAC.

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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MOUCHE PRESENTLY APPEARED . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"'We can't desert God's cause any more than that of an emperor,' replied the priest" . . . . . 105

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# SONS OF THE SOIL.

## FIRST PART.

*Whoso land hath, contention hath.*

### I.

### THE CHÂTEAU.

Les Aigues, August 6, 1828.

To Monsieur Nathan:

My dear Nathan, — You, who provide the public with such delightful dreams through the magic of your imagination, are now to follow me while I make you dream a dream of truth. You shall then tell me whether the present century is likely to bequeath such dreams to the Nathans and the Blondets of the year 1923; you shall estimate the distance at which we now are from the days when the Florines of the eighteenth century found, on awaking, a château like Les Aigues in the terms of their bargain.

My dear fellow, if you receive this letter in the morning, let your mind travel, as you lie in bed, fifty leagues or thereabouts from Paris, along the great mail road which leads to the confines of Burgundy, and behold two small lodges built of red brick, joined, or separated, by a rail painted green. It was there that the diligence deposited your friend and correspondent.



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On either side of this double pavilion grows a quick-set hedge, from which the brambles straggle like stray locks of hair. Here and there a tree shoots boldly up; flowers bloom on the slopes of the wayside ditch, bathing their feet in its green and sluggish water. The hedge at both ends meets and joins two strips of woodland, and the double meadow thus inclosed is doubtless the result of a clearing.

These dusty and deserted lodges give entrance to a magnificent avenue of centennial elms, whose umbrageous heads lean toward each other and form a long and most majestic arbor. The grass grows in this avenue, and only a few wheel-tracks can be seen along its double width of way. The great age of the trees, the breadth of the avenue, the venerable construction of the lodges, the brown tints of their stone courses, all bespeak an approach to some half-regal residence.

Before reaching this enclosure from the height of an eminence such as we Frenchmen rather conceitedly call a mountain, at the foot of which lies the village of Conches (the last post-house), I had seen the long valley of Aigues, at the farther end of which the mail road turns to follow a straight line into the little sub-prefecture of La Ville-aux-Fayes, over which, as you know, the nephew of our friend des Lupeaulx lords it. Tall forests lying on the horizon, along vast slopes which skirt a river, command this rich valley, which is framed in the far distance by the mountains of a lesser Switzerland, called the Morvan. These forests belong to Les Aigues, and to the Marquis de Ronquerolles and the Comte de Soulanges, whose castles and parks and villages, seen in the distance from these

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heights, give the scene a strong resemblance to the imaginary landscapes of Velvet Breughel.

If these details do not remind you of all the castles in the air you have desired to possess in France you are not worthy to receive the present narrative of an astounded Parisian. At last I have seen a landscape where art is blended with nature in such a way that neither of them spoils the other; the art is natural, and the nature artistic. I have found the oasis that you and I have dreamed of when reading novels,— nature luxuriant and adorned, rolling lines that are not confused, something wild withal, unkempt, mysterious, not common. Jump that green railing and come on!

When I tried to look up the avenue, which the sun never penetrates except when it rises or when it sets, striping the road like a zebra with its oblique rays, my view was obstructed by an outline of rising ground; after that is passed, the long avenue is obstructed by a copse, within which the roads meet at a cross-ways, in the centre of which stands a stone obelisk, for all the world like an eternal exclamation mark. From the crevices between the foundation stones of this erection, which is topped by a spiked ball (what an idea!), hang flowering plants, blue or yellow according to the season. Les Aigues must certainly have been built by a woman, or for a woman; no man would have had such dainty ideas; the architect no doubt had his cue.

Passing through the little wood placed there as sentinel, I came upon a charming declivity, at the foot of which foamed and gurgled a little brook, which I crossed on a culvert of mossy stones, superb in color, the prettiest of all the mosaics which time manufactures. The avenue continues by the brookside up a gentle rise.

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In the distance, the first tableau is now seen, — a mill and its dam, a causeway and trees, linen laid out to dry, the thatched cottage of the miller, his fishing-nets, and the tank where the fish are kept, — not to speak of the miller's boy, who was already watching me. No matter where you are in the country, however solitary you may think yourself, you are certain to be the focus of the two eyes of a country bumpkin; a laborer rests on his hoe, a vine-dresser straightens his bent back, a little goat-girl, or shepherdess, or milkmaid climbs a willow to stare at you.

Presently the avenue merges into an alley of acacias, which leads to an iron railing made in the days when iron-workers fashioned those slender filagrees which are not unlike the copies set us by a writing-master. On either side of the railing is a ha-ha, the edges of which bristle with angry spikes, — regular porcupines in metal. The railing is closed at both ends by two porter's-lodges, like those of the palace at Versailles, and the gateway is surmounted by colossal vases. The gold of the arabesques is ruddy, for rust has added its tints, but this entrance, called "the gate of the Avenue," which plainly shows the hand of the Great Dauphin (to whom, indeed, Les Aigues owes it), seems to me none the less beautiful for that. At the end of each ha-ha the walls of the park, built of rough-hewn stone, begin. These stones, set in a mortar made of reddish earth, display their variegated colors, the warm yellows of the silex, the white of the lime carbonates, the russet browns of the sandstone, in many a fantastic shape. As you first enter it, the park is gloomy, the walls are hidden by creeping plants and by trees that for fifty years have heard no sound of axe. One might think it a virgin forest, made

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primeval again through some phenomenon granted exclusively to forests. The trunks of the trees are swathed with lichen which hangs from one to another. Mistletoe, with its viscid leaves, droops from every fork of the branches where moisture settles. I have found gigantic ivies, wild arabesques which flourish only at fifty leagues from Paris, here where land does not cost enough to make one sparing of it. The landscape on such free lines covers a great deal of ground. Nothing is smoothed off; rakes are unknown, ruts and ditches are full of water, frogs are tranquilly delivered of their tadpoles, the woodland flowers bloom, and the heather is as beautiful as that I have seen on your mantle-shelf in January in the elegant beau-pot sent by Florine. This mystery is intoxicating, it inspires vague desires. The forest odors, beloved of souls that are epicures of poesy, who delight in the tiny mosses, the noxious fungi, the moist mould, the willows, the balsams, the wild thyme, the green waters of a pond, the golden star of the yellow water-lily, — the breath of all such vigorous propagations came to my nostrils and filled me with a single thought; was it their soul? I seemed to see a rose-tinted gown floating along the winding alley.

The path ended abruptly in another copse, where birches and poplars and all the quivering trees palpitated, — an intelligent family with graceful branches and elegant bearing, the trees of a love as free! It was from this point, my dear fellow, that I saw a pond covered with the white water-lily and other plants with broad flat leaves and narrow slender ones, on which lay a boat painted white and black, as light as a nutshell and dainty as the wherry of a Seine boatman.

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Beyond rose the château, built in 1560, of fine red brick, with stone courses and copings, and window-frames in which the sashes were of small leaded panes (O Versailles!). The stone is hewn in diamond points, but hollowed, as in the Ducal Palace at Venice on the façade toward the Bridge of Sighs. There are no regular lines about the castle except in the centre building, from which projects a stately portico with double flights of curving steps, and round balusters slender at their base and broadening at the middle. The main building is surrounded by clock-towers and sundry modern turrets, with galleries and vases more or less Greek. No harmony there, my dear Nathan! These heterogeneous erections are wrapped, so to speak, by various evergreen trees whose branches shed their brown needles upon the roofs, nourishing the lichen and giving tone to the cracks and crevices where the eye delights to wander. Here you see the Italian pine, the stone pine, with its red bark and its majestic parasol; here a cedar two hundred years old, weeping willows, a Norway spruce, and a beech which overtops them all; and there, in front of the main tower, some very singular shrubs, — a yew trimmed in a way that recalls some long-decayed garden of old France, and magnolias with hortensias at their feet. In short, the place is the Invalides of the heroes of horticulture, once the fashion and now forgotten, like all other heroes.

A chimney, with curious copings, which was sending forth great volumes of smoke, assured me that this delightful scene was not an opera setting. A kitchen reveals human beings. Now imagine *me*, Blondet, who shiver as if in the polar regions at Saint-Cloud, in the midst of this glowing Burgundian climate. The

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sun sends down its warmest rays, the king-fisher watches on the shores of the pond, the cricket chirps, the grain-pods burst, the poppy drops its morphia in glutinous tears, and all are clearly defined on the dark-blue ether. Above the ruddy soil of the terraces flames that joyous natural punch which intoxicates the insects and the flowers and dazzles our eyes and browns our faces. The grape is beading, its tendrils fall in a veil of threads whose delicacy puts to shame the lace-makers. Beside the house blue larkspur, nasturtium, and sweet-peas are blooming. From a distance orange-trees and tuberoses scent the air. After the poetic exhalations of the woods (a gradual preparation) came the delectable pastilles of this botanic seraglio.

Standing on the portico, like the queen of flowers, behold a woman robed in white, with hair unpowdered, holding a parasol lined with white silk, but herself whiter than the silk, whiter than the lilies at her feet, whiter than the starry jasmine that climbed the balustrade, — a woman, a Frenchwoman born in Russia, who said as I approached her, "I had almost given you up." She had seen me as I left the copse. With what perfection do all women, even the most guileless, understand the arrangement of a scenic effect? The movements of the servants, who were preparing to serve breakfast, showed me that the meal had been delayed until after the arrival of the diligence. She had not ventured to come to meet me.

Is not this our dream, — the dream of all lovers of the beautiful, under whatsoever form it comes; the seraphic beauty that Luini put into his Marriage of the Virgin, that noble fresco at Sarono; the beauty that Rubens grasped in the tumult of his "Battle

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of the Thermodon ; " the beauty that five centuries have elaborated in the cathedrals of Seville and Milan ; the beauty of the Saracens at Granada, the beauty of Louis XIV. at Versailles, the beauty of the Alps, and that of this Limagne in which I stand?

Belonging to the estate, about which there is nothing too princely, nor yet too financial, where prince and farmer-general have both lived (which fact serves to explain it), are four thousand acres of woodland, a park of some nine hundred acres, the mill, three leased farms, another immense farm at Conches, and vineyards, — the whole producing a revenue of about seventy thousand francs a year. Now you know Les Aigues, my dear fellow ; where I have been expected for the last two weeks, and where I am at this moment, in the chintz-lined chamber assigned to dearest friends.

Above the park, toward Conches, a dozen little brooks, clear, limpid streams coming from the Morvan, fall into the pond, after adorning with their silvery ribbons the valleys of the park and the magnificent gardens around the château. The name of the place, Les Aigues, comes from these charming streams of water ; the estate was originaliy called in the old title-deeds " Les Aigues-Vives " to distinguish it from " Aigues-Mortes ; " but the word " Vives " has now been dropped. The pond empties into the stream, which follows the course of the avenue, through a wide and straight canal bordered on both sides and along its whole length by weeping willows. This canal, thus arched, produces a delightful effect. Gliding through it, seated on a thwart of the little boat, one could fancy one's self in the nave of some great cathedral, the choir being formed of the main building of the house seen at

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the end of it. When the setting sun casts its orange tones mingled with amber upon the casements of the château, the effect is that of painted windows. At the other end of the canal we see Blangy, the county-town, containing about sixty houses, and the village church, which is nothing more than a tumbledown building with a wooden clock-tower which appears to hold up a roof of broken tiles. One comfortable house and the parsonage are distinguishable; but the township is a large one, — about two hundred scattered houses in all, those of the village forming as it were the capital. The roads are lined with fruit-trees, and numerous little gardens are strewn here and there, — true country gardens with everything in them; flowers, onions, cabbages and grape-vines, currants, and a great deal of manure. The village has a primitive air; it is rustic, and has that decorative simplicity which we artists are forever seeking. In the far distance is the little town of Soulanges overhanging a vast sheet of water, like the buildings on the lake of Thun.

When you stroll in the park, which has four gates, each superb in style, you feel that our mythological Arcadias are flat and stale. Arcadia is in Burgundy, not in Greece; Arcadia is at Les Aigues and nowhere else. A river, made by scores of brooklets, crosses the park at its lower level with a serpentine movement; giving a dewy freshness and tranquillity to the scene, — an air of solitude, which reminds one of a convent of Carthusians, and all the more because, on an artificial island in the river, is a hermitage in ruins, the interior elegance of which is worthy of the luxurious financier who constructed it. Les Aigues, my dear Nathan, once belonged to that Bouret who spent two

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millions to receive Louis XV. on a single occasion under his roof. How many ardent passions, how many distinguished minds, how many fortunate circumstances have contributed to make this beautiful place what it is! A mistress of Henri IV. rebuilt the château where it now stands. The favorite of the Great Dauphin, Mademoiselle Choin (to whom Les Aigues was given), added a number of farms to it. Bouret furnished the house with all the elegancies of Parisian homes for an Opera celebrity; and to him Les Aigues owes the restoration of its ground floor in the style Louis XV.

I have often stood rapt in admiration at the beauty of the dining-room. The eye is first attracted to the ceiling, painted in fresco in the Italian manner, where lightsome arabesques are frolicking. Female forms, in stucco ending in foliage, support at regular distances corbeils of fruit, from which spring the garlands of the ceiling. Charming paintings, the work of unknown artists, fill the panels between the female figures, representing the luxuries of the table, — boar's-heads, salmon, rare shellfish, and all edible things, — which fantastically suggest men and women and children, and rival the whimsical imagination of the Chinese, — the people who best understand, to my thinking at least, the art of decoration. The mistress of the house finds a bell-wire beneath her feet to summon servants, who enter only when required, disturbing no interviews and overhearing no secrets. The panels above the doorways represent gay scenes; all the embrasures, both of doors and windows, are in marble mosaics. The room is heated from below. Every window looks forth on some delightful view.

This room communicates with a bath-room on one

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side and on the other with a boudoir which opens into the salon. The bath-room is lined with Sèvres tiles, painted in monochrome, the floor is mosaic, and the bath marble. An alcove, hidden by a picture painted on copper, which turns on a pivot, contains a couch in gilt wood of the truest Pompadour. The ceiling is lapis-lazuli starred with gold. The tiles are painted from designs by Boucher. Bath, table and love are therefore closely united.

After the salon, which, I should tell you, my dear fellow, exhibits the magnificence of the Louis XIV. manner, you enter a fine billiard-room unrivalled so far as I know in Paris itself. The entrance to this suite of ground-floor apartments is through a semi-circular antechamber, at the lower end of which is a fairy-like staircase, lighted from above, which leads to other parts of the house, all built at various epochs — and to think that they chopped off the heads of the wealthy in 1793! Good heavens! why can't people understand that the marvels of art are impossible in a land where there are no great fortunes, no secure, luxurious lives? If the Left insists on killing kings why not leave us a few little princelings with money in their pockets?

At the present moment these accumulated treasures belong to a charming woman with an artistic soul, who is not content with merely restoring them magnificently, but who keeps the place up with loving care. Sham philosophers, studying themselves while they profess to be studying humanity, call these glorious things extravagance. They grovel before cotton prints and the tasteless designs of modern industry, as if we were greater and happier in these days than in those of

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Henri IV., Louis XIV., and Louis XVI., monarchs who have all left the stamp of their reigns upon Les Aigues. What palace, what royal castle, what mansions, what noble works of art, what gold brocaded stuffs are sacred now? The petticoats of our grandmothers go to cover the chairs in these degenerate days. Selfish and thieving interlopers that we are, we pull down everything and plant cabbages where marvels once were rife. Only yesterday the plough levelled Persan, that magnificent domain which gave a title to one of the most opulent families of the old parliament; hammers have demolished Montmorency, which cost an Italian follower of Napoleon unheard of sums; Val, the creation of Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély, Cassan, built by a mistress of the Prince de Conti; in all, four royal houses have disappeared in the valley of the Oise alone. We are getting a Roman campagna around Paris in advance of the days when a tempest shall blow from the north and overturn our plaster palaces and our pasteboard decorations.

Now see, my dear fellow, to what the habit of *bombasticising* in newspapers brings you to. Here am I writing a downright article. Does the mind have its ruts, like a road? I stop; for I rob the mail, and I rob myself, and you may be yawning — to be continued in our next; I hear the second bell, which summons me to one of those abundant breakfasts the fashion of which has long passed away, in the dining-rooms of Paris, be it understood.

Here 's the history of my Arcadia. In 1815, there died at Les Aigues one of the famous wantons of the last century, — a singer, forgotten of the guillotine and the nobility, after preying upon exchequers, upon

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literature, upon aristocracy, and all but reaching the scaffold; forgotten, like so many fascinating old women who expiate their golden youth in country solitudes, and replace their lost loves by another, — man by Nature. Such women live with the flowers, with the woodland scents, with the sky, with the sunshine, with all that sings and skips and shines and sprouts, — the birds, the squirrels, the flowers, the grass; they know nothing about these things, they cannot explain them, but they love them; they love them so well that they forget dukes, marshals, rivalries, financiers, follies, luxuries, their paste jewels and their real diamonds, their heeled slippers and their rouge, — all, for the sweetness of country life.

I have gathered, my dear fellow, much precious information about the old age of Mademoiselle Laguerre; for, to tell you the truth, the after life of such women as Florine, Mariette, Suzanne de Val Noble, and Tullia has made me, every now and then, extremely inquisitive, as though I were a child inquiring what had become of the old moons.

In 1790 Mademoiselle Laguerre, alarmed at the turn of public affairs, came to settle at Les Aigues, bought and given to her by Bouret, who passed several summers with her at the château. Terrified at the fate of Madame du Barry, she buried her diamonds. At that time she was only fifty-three years of age, and according to her lady's-maid, afterwards married to a gendarme named Soudry, "Madame was more beautiful than ever." My dear Nathan, Nature has no doubt her private reasons for treating women of this sort like spoiled children; excesses, instead of killing them, fatten them, preserve them, renew their youth. Under

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a lymphatic appearance they have nerves which maintain their marvellous physique; they actually preserve their beauty for reasons which would make a virtuous woman haggard. No, upon my word, Nature is not moral!

Mademoiselle Laguerre lived an irreproachable life at Les Aigues, one might even call it a saintly one, after her famous adventure, — you remember it? One evening in a paroxysm of despairing love, she fled from the opera-house in her stage dress, rushed into the country, and passed the night weeping by the wayside. (Ah! how they have calumniated the love of Louis XV.'s time!) She was so unused to see the sunrise, that she hailed it with one of her finest songs. Her attitude, quite as much as her tinsel, drew the peasants about her; amazed at her gestures, her voice, her beauty, they took her for an angel, and dropped on their knees around her. If Voltaire had not existed we might have thought it a new miracle. I don't know if God gave her much credit for her tardy virtue, for love after all must be a sickening thing to a woman as weary of it as a wanton of the old Opera. Mademoiselle Laguerre was born in 1740, and her hey-day was in 1760, when Monsieur (I forget his name) was called the *ministre de la guerre*, on account of his liaison with her. She abandoned that name, which was quite unknown down here, and called herself Madame des Aigues, as if to merge her identity in the estate, which she delighted to improve with a taste that was profoundly artistic. When Bonaparte became First Consul, she increased her property by the purchase of church lands, for which she used the proceeds of her diamonds. As an Opera divinity never knows how to take care of her money,

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she intrusted the management of the estate to a steward, occupying herself with her flowers and fruits and with the beautifying of the park.

After Mademoiselle was dead and buried at Blangy, the notary of Soulanges — that little town which lies between Ville-aux-Fayes and Blangy, the capital of the township — made an elaborate inventory, and sought out the heirs of the singer, who never knew she had any. Eleven families of poor laborers living near Amiens, and sleeping in cotton sheets, awoke one fine morning in golden ones. The property was sold at auction. Les Aigues was bought by Montcornet, who had laid by enough during his campaigns in Spain and Pomerania to make the purchase, which cost about eleven hundred thousand francs, including the furniture. The general, no doubt, felt the influence of these luxurious apartments; and I was arguing with the countess only yesterday that her marriage was a direct result of the purchase of Les Aigues.

To rightly understand the countess, my dear Nathan, you must know that the general is a violent man, red as fire, five feet nine inches tall, round as a tower, with a thick neck and the shoulders of a blacksmith, which must have amply filled his cuirass. Montcornet commanded the cuirassiers at the battle of Essling (called by the Austrians Gross-Aspern), and came near perishing when that noble corps was driven back on the Danube. He managed to cross the river astride of a log of wood. The cuirassiers, finding the bridge down, took the glorious resolution, at Montcornet's command, to turn and resist the entire Austrian army, which carried off on the morrow over thirty wagon-loads of cuirasses. The Germans invented a name for their enemies on

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this occasion which means "men of iron."[1] Montcornet has the outer man of a hero of antiquity. His arms

[1] I do not, on principle, like foot-notes, and this is the first I have ever allowed myself. Its historical interest must be my excuse; it will prove, moreover, that descriptions of battles should be something more than the dry particulars of technical writers, who for the last three thousand years have told us about left and right wings and centres being broken or driven in, but never a word about the soldier himself, his sufferings, and his heroism. The conscientious care with which I prepared myself to write the "Scenes from Military Life," led me to many a battle-field once wet with the blood of France and her enemies. Among them I went to Wagram. When I reached the shores of the Danube, opposite Lobau, I noticed on the bank, which is covered with turf, certain undulations that reminded me of the furrows in a field of lucern. I asked the reason of it, thinking I should hear of some new method of agriculture: "There sleep the cavalry of the imperial guard," said the peasant who served us as a guide; "those are their graves you see there." The words made me shudder. Prince Frederic Schwartzenburg, who translated them, added that the man had himself driven one of the wagons laden with cuirasses. By one of the strange chances of war our guide had served a breakfast to Napoleon on the morning of the battle of Wagram. Though poor, he had kept the double napoleon which the Emperor gave him for his milk and his eggs. The curate of Gross-Aspern took us to the famous cemetery where French and Austrians struggled together knee-deep in blood, with a courage and obstinacy glorious to each. There, while explaining that a marble tablet (to which our attention had been attracted, and on which were inscribed the names of the owner of Gross-Aspern, who had been killed on the third day) was the sole compensation ever given to the family, he said, in a tone of deep sadness: "It was a time of great misery, and of great hopes; but now are the days of forgetfulness." The saying

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are stout and vigorous, his chest deep and broad; his head has a leonine aspect, his voice is of those that can order a charge in the thick of the battle; but he has nothing more than the courage of a daring man; he lacks mind and breadth of view. Like other generals to whom military common-sense, the natural boldness of those who spend their lives in danger, and the habit of command gives an appearance of superiority, Montcornet has an imposing effect when you first meet him; he seems a Titan, but he contains a dwarf, like the pasteboard giant who saluted Queen Elizabeth at the gates of Kenilworth. Choleric though kind, and full of imperial hauteur, he has the caustic tongue of a soldier,

seemed to me sublime in its simplicity; but when I came to reflect upon the matter, I felt there was some justification for the apparent ingratitude of the House of Austria. Neither nations nor kings are wealthy enough to reward all the devotions to which these great struggles give rise. Let those who serve a cause with a secret expectation of recompense, set a price upon their blood and become mercenaries. Those who wield either sword or pen for their country's good ought to think of nothing but of *doing their best*, as our fathers used to say, and expect nothing, not even glory, except as a happy accident.

It was in rushing to retake this famous cemetery for the third time that Massena, wounded and carried in the box of a cabriolet, made this splendid harangue to his soldiers: "What! you rascally curs, who have only five sous a day while I have forty thousand, do you let me go ahead of you?" All the world knows the order which the Emperor sent to his lieutenant by M. de Sainte-Croix, who swam the Danube three times: "Die or retake the village; it is a question of saving the army; the bridges are destroyed."

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and is quick at repartee, but quicker still with a blow. He may have been superb on a battle-field; in a household he is simply intolerable. He knows no love but barrack love, — the love which those clever myth-makers, the ancients, placed under the patronage of Eros, son of Mars and Venus. Those delightful chroniclers of the old religions provided themselves with a dozen different Loves. Study the fathers and the attributes of these Loves, and you will discover a complete social nomenclature, — and yet we fancy that we originate things! When the world turns upside down like an hour-glass, when the seas become continents, Frenchmen will find cannons, steamboats, newspapers, and maps wrapped up in seaweed at the bottom of what is now our ocean.

Now, I must tell you that the Comtesse de Montcornet is a fragile, timid, delicate little woman. What do you think of such a marriage as that? To those who know society such things are common enough; a well-assorted marriage is the exception. Nevertheless, I have come to see how it is that this slender little creature handles her bobbins in a way to lead this heavy, solid, stolid general precisely as he himself used to lead his cuirassiers.

If Montcornet begins to bluster before his Virginie, Madame lays a finger on her lips and he is silent. He smokes his pipes and his cigars in a kiosk fifty feet from the chatêau, and airs himself before he returns to the house. Proud of his subjection, he turns to her, like a bear drunk on grapes, and says, when anything is proposed, "If Madame approves." When he comes to his wife's room, with that heavy step which makes the tiles creak as though they were boards, and she, not

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wanting him, calls out: "Don't come in!" he performs a military volte-face and says humbly: "You will let me know when I can see you?" — in the very tones with which he shouted to his cuirassiers on the banks of the Danube: "Men, we must die, and die well, since there 's nothing else we can do!" I have heard him say, speaking of his wife, "Not only do I love her, but I venerate her." When he flies into a passion which defies all restraint and bursts all bonds, the little woman retires into her own room and leaves him to shout. But four or five hours later she will say: "Don't get into a passion, my dear, you might break a blood-vessel; and besides, you hurt me." Then the lion of Essling retreats out of sight to wipe his eyes. Sometimes he comes into the salon when she and I are talking, and if she says: "Don't disturb us, he is reading to me," he leaves us without a word.

It is only strong men, choleric and powerful, thunderbolts of war, diplomats with olympian heads, or men of genius, who can show this utter confidence, this generous devotion to weakness, this constant protection, this love without jealousy, this easy good humor with a woman. Good heavens! I place the science of the countess's management of her husband as far above the peevish, arid virtues as the satin of a causeuse is superior to the Utrecht velvet of a dirty bourgeois sofa.

My dear fellow, I have spent six days in this delightful country-house, and I never tire of admiring the beauties of the park, surrounded by forests where pretty wood-paths lead beside the brooks. Nature and its silence, these tranquil pleasures, this placid life to which she woos me, — all attract. Ah! here is true literature; no fault of style among the meadows. Happiness

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forgets all things here, — even the Débats! It has rained all the morning; while the countess slept and Montcornet tramped over his domain, I have compelled myself to keep my rash, imprudent promise to write to you.

Until now, though I was born at Alençon, of an old judge and a prefect, so they say, and though I know something of agriculture, I supposed the tale of estates bringing in four or five thousand francs a month to be a fable. Money, to me, meant a couple of dreadful things, — work and a publisher, journalism and politics. When shall we poor fellows come upon a land where gold springs up with the grass? That is what I desire for you and for me and the rest of us in the name of the theatre, and of the press, and of book-making! Amen!

Will Florine be jealous of the late Mademoiselle Laguerre? Our modern Bourets have no French nobles now to show them how to live; they hire one opera-box among three of them; they subscribe for their pleasures; they no longer cut down magnificently bound quartos to match the octavos in their library; in fact, they scarcely buy even stitched paper books. What is to become of us?

Adieu; continue to care for

Your BLONDET.

If this letter, dashed off by the idlest pen of the century, had not by some lucky chance been preserved, it would have been almost impossible to describe Les Aigues; and without this description the history of the horrible events that occurred there would certainly be less interesting.

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After that remark some persons will expect to see the flashing of the cuirass of the former colonel of the imperial guard, and the raging of his anger as he falls like a waterspout on his little wife; so that the end of this present history may be like the end of all modern dramas, — a tragedy of the bed-chamber. Perhaps the fatal scene will take place in that charming room with the blue monochromes, where beautiful ideal birds are painted on the ceilings and the shutters, where Chinese monsters laugh with open jaws on the mantle-shelf, and dragons, green and gold, twist their tails in curious convolutions around rich vases, and Japanese fantasy embroiders its designs of many colors; where sofas and reclining-chairs and consoles and what-nots invite to that contemplative idleness which forbids all action.

No; the drama here to be developed is not one of private life; it concerns things higher, or lower. Expect no scenes of passion; the truth of this history is only too dramatic. And remember, the historian should never forget that his mission is to do justice to all; the poor and the prosperous are equals before his pen; to him the peasant appears in the grandeur of his misery, and the rich in the pettiness of his folly. Moreover, the rich man has passions, the peasant only wants. The peasant is therefore doubly poor; and if, politically, his aggressions must be pitilessly repressed, to the eyes of humanity and religion he is sacred.

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## II.

### A BUCOLIC OVERLOOKED BY VIRGIL.

When a Parisian drops into the country he is cut off from all his usual habits, and soon feels the dragging hours, no matter how attentive his friends may be to him. Therefore, because it is so impossible to prolong in a tête-à-tête conversations that are soon exhausted, the master and mistress of a country-house are apt to say, calmly, "You will be terribly bored here." It is true that to understand the delights of country life one must have something to do, some interests in it; one must know the nature of the work to be done, and the alternating harmony of toil and pleasure, — eternal symbol of human life.

When a Parisian has recovered his powers of sleeping, shaken off the fatigues of the journey, and accustomed himself to country habits, the hardest period of the day (if he wears thin boots and is neither a sportsman nor an agriculturalist) is the early morning. Between the hours of waking and breakfasting, the women of the family are sleeping or dressing, and therefore unapproachable; the master of the house is out and about his own affairs; a Parisian is therefore compelled to be alone from eight to eleven o'clock, the hour chosen in all country-houses for breakfast. Now, having got what amusement he can out of carefully dressing himself, he has soon exhausted that

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resource. Then, perhaps, he has brought with him some work, which he finds it impossible to do, and which goes back untouched, after he sees the difficulties of doing it, into his valise; a writer is then obliged to wander about the park and gape at nothing or count the big trees. The easier the life, the more irksome such occupations are, — unless, indeed, one belongs to the sect of shaking quakers or to the honorable guild of carpenters or taxidermists. If one really had, like the owners of estates, to live in the country, it would be well to supply one's self with a geological, mineralogical, entomological, or botanical hobby; but a sensible man does n't give himself a vice merely to kill time for a fortnight. The noblest estate, and the finest châteaux soon pall on those who possess nothing but the sight of them. The beauties of nature seem rather squalid compared to the representation of them at the opera. Paris, by retrospection, shines from all its facets. Unless some particular interest attaches us, as it did in Blondet's case, to scenes honored by the steps and lighted by the eyes of a certain person, one would envy the birds their wings and long to get back tc the endless, exciting scenes of Paris and its harrowing strifes.

The long letter of the young journalist must make most intelligent minds suppose that he had reached, morally and physically, that particular phase of satisfied passions and comfortable happiness which certain winged creatures fed in Strasbourg so perfectly represent when, with their heads sunk behind their protruding gizzards, they neither see nor wish to see the most appetizing food. So, when the formidable letter was finished, the writer felt the need of getting

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away from the gardens of Armida and doing something to enliven the deadly void of the morning hours; for the hours between breakfast and dinner belonged to the mistress of the house, who knew very well how to make them pass quickly. To keep, as Madame de Montcornet did, a man of talent in the country without ever seeing on his face the false smile of satiety, or detecting the yawn of a weariness that cannot be concealed, is a great triumph for a woman. The affection which is equal to such a test certainly ought to be eternal. It is to be wondered at that women do not oftener employ it to judge of their lovers; a fool, an egoist, or a petty nature could never stand it. Philip the Second himself, the Alexander of dissimulation, would have told his secrets if condemned to a month's tête-à-tête in the country. Perhaps this is why kings seek to live in perpetual motion, and allow no one to see them more than fifteen minutes at a time.

Notwithstanding that he had received the delicate attentions of one of the most charming women in Paris, Émile Blondet was able to feel once more the long forgotten delights of a truant schoolboy; and on the morning of the day after his letter was written he had himself called by François, the head valet, who was specially appointed to wait on him, for the purpose of exploring the valley of the Avonne.

The Avonne is a little river which, being swollen above Conches by numerous rivulets, some of which rise in Les Aigues, falls at Ville-aux-Fayes into one of the large affluents of the Seine. The geographical position of the Avonne, navigable for over twelve miles, had, ever since Jean Rouvet invented rafts, given full money value to the forests of Les Aigues, Soulanges,

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and Ronquerolles, standing on the crest of the hills between which this charming river flows. The park of Les Aigues covers the greater part of the valley, between the river (bordered on both sides by the forest called des Aigues) and the royal mail road, defined by a line of old elms in the distance along the slopes of the Avonne mountains, which are in fact the foot-hills of that magnificent amphitheatre called the Morvan.

However vulgar the comparison may be, the park, lying thus at the bottom of the valley, is like an enormous fish with its head at Conches and its tail in the village of Blangy; for it widens in the middle to nearly three hundred acres, while towards Conches it counts less than fifty, and sixty at Blangy. The position of this estate, between three villages, and only three miles from the little town of Soulanges, from which the descent is rapid, may perhaps have led to the strife and caused the excesses which are the chief interest attaching to the place. If, when seen from the mail road or from the uplands beyond Ville-aux-Fayes, the paradise of Les Aigues induces mere passing travellers to commit the mortal sin of envy, why should the rich burghers of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes who had it before their eyes and admired it every day of their lives, have been more virtuous?

This last topographical detail was needed to explain the site, also the use of the four gates by which alone the park of Les Aigues was entered; for it was completely surrounded by walls, except where nature had provided a fine view, and at such points sunk fences or ha-has had been placed. The four gates, called the gate of Conches, the gate of the Avonne, the gate of Blangy, and the gate of the Avenue, showed the styles of the

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different periods at which they were constructed so admirably that a brief description, in the interest of archæologists, will presently be given, as brief as the one Blondet has already written about the gate of the Avenue.

After eight days of strolling about with the countess, the illustrous editor of the "Journal des Débats" knew by heart the Chinese kiosk, the bridges, the isles, the hermitage, the dairy, the ruined temple, the Babylonian ice-house, and all the other delusions invented by landscape architects which some nine hundred acres of land can be made to serve. He now wished to find the sources of the Avonne, which the general and the countess daily extolled in the evening, making plans to visit them which were daily forgotten the next morning. Above Les Aigues the Avonne really had the appearance of an alpine torrent. Sometimes it hollowed a bed among the rocks, sometimes it went underground; on this side the brooks came down in cascades, there they flowed like the Loire on sandy shallows where rafts could not pass on account of the shifting channels. Blondet took a short cut through the labyrinths of the park to reach the gate of Conches. This gate demands a few words, which give, moreover, certain historical details about the property.

The original founder of Les Aigues was a younger son of the Soulanges family, enriched by marriage, whose chief ambition was to make his elder brother jealous, — a sentiment, by the bye, to which we owe the fairy-land of Isola Bella in the Lago Maggiore. In the middle ages the castle of Les Aigues stood on the banks of the Avonne. Of this old building nothing remains but the gateway, which has a porch like the entrance to

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a fortified town, flanked by two round towers with conical roofs. Above the arch of the porch are heavy stone courses, now draped with vegetation, showing three large windows with cross-bar sashes. A winding stairway in one of the towers leads to two chambers, and a kitchen occupies the other tower. The roof of the porch, of pointed shape like all old timber-work, is noticeable for two weathercocks perched at each end of a ridge-pole ornamented with fantastic iron-work. Many an important place cannot boast of so fine a town hall. On the outside of this gateway, the keystone of the arch still bears the arms of Soulanges, preserved by the hardness of the stone on which the chisel of the artist carved them, as follows: *Azure, on a pale, argent, three pilgrim's staffs sable; a fess bronchant, gules, charged with four crosses patée, fitched, or;* with the heraldic form of shield awarded to younger sons. Blondet deciphered the motto, *Je soule agir,* — one of those puns that crusaders delighted to make upon their names, and which brings to mind a fine political maxim, which, as we shall see later, was unfortunately forgotten by Montcornet. The gate, which was opened for Blondet by a very pretty girl, was of time-worn wood clamped with iron. The keeper, wakened by the creaking of the hinges, put his nose out of the window and showed himself in his night-shirt.

"So our keepers sleep till this time of day!" thought the Parisian, who fancied himself very knowing in rural customs.

After a walk of about quarter of an hour, he reached the sources of the river above Conches, where his ravished eyes beheld one of those landscapes that ought to be described, like the history of France, in a thousand

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volumes or in only one. We must here content ourselves with two paragraphs.

A projecting rock, covered with dwarf trees and abraded at its base by the Avonne, to which circumstance it owes a slight resemblance to an enormous turtle lying across the river, forms an arch through which the eye takes in a little sheet of water, clear as a mirror, where the stream seems to sleep until it reaches in the distance a series of cascades falling among huge rocks, where little weeping willows with elastic motion sway back and forth to the flow of waters.

Beyond these cascades is the hillside, rising sheer, like a Rhine rock clothed with moss and heather, gullied like it, again, by sharp ridges of schist and mica sending down, here and there, white foaming rivulets to which a little meadow, always watered and always green, serves as a cup; farther on, beyond the picturesque chaos and in contrast to this wild, solitary nature, the gardens of Conches are seen, with the village roofs and the clock-tower and the outlying fields.

There are the two paragraphs, but the rising sun, the purity of the air, the dewy sheen, the melody of woods and waters — imagine them!

"Almost as charming as at the Opera," thought Blondet, making his way along the banks of the unnavigable portion of the Avonne, whose caprices contrast with the straight and deep and silent stream of the lower river, flowing between the tall trees of the forest of Les Aigues.

Blondet did not proceed far on his morning walk, for he was presently brought to a stand-still by the sight of a peasant, — one of those who, in this drama, are supernumeraries so essential to its action that it may

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be doubted whether they are not in fact its leading actors.

When the clever journalist reached a group of rocks where the main stream is imprisoned, as it were, between two portals, he saw a man standing so motionless as to excite his curiosity, while the clothes and general air of this living statue greatly puzzled him.

The humble personage before him was a living presentment of the old men dear to Charlet's pencil; resembling the troopers of that Homer of soldiery in a strong frame able to endure hardship, and his immortal skirmishers in a fiery, crimson, knotted face, showing small capacity for submission. A coarse felt hat, the brim of which was held to the crown by stitches, protected a nearly bald head from the weather; below it fell a quantity of white hair which a painter would gladly have paid four francs an hour to copy, — a dazzling mass of snow, worn like that in all the classical representations of Deity. It was easy to guess from the way in which the cheeks sank in, continuing the lines of the mouth, that the toothless old fellow was more given to the bottle than the trencher. His thin white beard gave a threatening expression to his profile by the stiffness of its short bristles. The eyes, too small for his enormous face, and sloping like those of a pig, betrayed cunning and also laziness; but at this particular moment they were gleaming with the intent look he cast upon the river. The sole garments of this curious figure were an old blouse, formerly blue, and trousers of the coarse burlap used in Paris to wrap bales. All city people would have shuddered at the sight of his broken sabots, without even a wisp

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of straw to stop the cracks; and it is very certain that the blouse and the trousers had no money value at all except to a paper-maker.

As Blondet examined this rural Diogenes, he admitted the possibility of a type of peasantry he had seen in old tapestries, old pictures, old sculptures, and which, up to this time, had seemed to him imaginary. He resolved for the future not to utterly condemn the school of ugliness, perceiving a possibility that in man beauty may be but the flattering exception, a chimera in which the race struggles to believe.

"What can be the ideas, the morals, the habits, of such a being? What is he thinking of?" thought Blondet, seized with curiosity. "Is he my fellow-creature? We have nothing in common but shape, and even that! —"

He noticed in the old man's limbs the peculiar rigidity of the tissues of persons who live in the open air, accustomed to the inclemencies of the weather and to the endurance of heat and cold, — hardened to everything, in short, — which makes their leathern skin almost a hide, and their nerves an apparatus against physical pain as powerful as that of the Russians or the Arabs.

"Here 's one of Cooper's Red-skins," thought Blondet; "one need n't go to America to study savages."

Though the Parisian was less than ten paces off, the old man did not turn his head, but kept looking at the opposite bank with a fixity which the fakirs of India give to their vitrified eyes and their stiffened joints. Compelled by the power of a species of magnetism, more contagious than people have any idea of, Blondet ended by gazing at the water himself.

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"Well, my good man, what do you see there?" he asked, after the lapse of a quarter of an hour, during which time he saw nothing to justify this intent contemplation.

"Hush!" whispered the old man, with a sign to Blondet not to ruffle the air with his voice; "You will frighten it —"

"What?"

"An otter, my good gentleman. If it hears us it 'll go quick under water. I 'm certain it jumped there; see! see! there, where the water bubbles! Ha! it sees a fish, it is after that! But my boy will grab it as it comes back. The otter, don't you know, is very rare; it is scientific game, and good eating, too. I get ten francs for every one I carry to Les Aigues, for the lady fasts Fridays, and to-morrow is Friday. Years agone the deceased madame used to pay me twenty francs, and gave me the skin to boot! Mouche," he called, in a low voice, "watch it!"

Blondet now perceived on the other side of the river two bright eyes, like those of a cat, beneath a tuft of alders; then he saw the tanned forehead and tangled hair of a boy about ten years of age, who was lying on his stomach and making signs towards the otter to let his master know he kept it well in sight. Blondet, completely mastered by the eagerness of the old man and boy, allowed the demon of the chase to get the better of him, — that demon with the double claws of hope and curiosity, who carries you whithersoever he will.

"The hatmakers buy the skin," continued the old man; "it 's so soft, so handsome! They cover caps with it."

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"Do you really think so, my old man?" said Blondet, smiling.

"Well truly, my good gentleman, you ought to know more than I, though I am seventy years old," replied the old fellow, very humbly and respectfully, falling into the attitude of a giver of holy water; "perhaps you can tell me why conductors and wine-merchants are so fond of it?"

Blondet, a master of irony, already on his guard from the word *scientific*, recollected the Maréchal de Richelieu and began to suspect some jest on the part of the old man; but he was reassured by his artless attitude and the perfectly stupid expression of his face.

"In my young days we had lots of otters," whispered the old fellow; "but they 've hunted 'em so that if we see the tail of one in seven years it is as much as ever we do. And the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes, — does n't monsieur know him? though he be a Parisian, he 's a fine young man like you, and he loves curiosities, — so, as I was saying, hearing of my talent for catching otters, for I know 'em as you know your alphabet, he says to me like this: 'Père Fourchon,' says he, 'when you find an otter bring it to me, and I 'll pay you well; and if it 's spotted white on the back,' says he, 'I 'll give you thirty francs.' That 's just what he did say to me as true as I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And there 's a learned man at Soulanges, Monsieur Gourdon, our doctor, who is making, so they tell me, a collection of natural history which has n't its mate at Dijon even; indeed he is first among the learned men in these parts, and he 'll pay me a fine price, too; he stuffs men and beasts. Now my boy there stands me out that that

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otter has got the white spots. 'If that's so,' says I to him, 'then the good God wishes well to us this morning!' Ha! did n't you see the water bubble? yes, there it is! there it is! Though it lives in a kind of a burrow, it sometimes stays whole days under water. Ha, there! it heard you, my good gentleman; it's on its guard now; for there 's not a more suspicious animal on earth; it 's worse than a woman."

"So you call women suspicious, do you?" said Blondet.

"Faith, monsieur, if you come from Paris you ought to know about that better than I. But you'd have done better for me if you had stayed in your bed and slept all the morning; don't you see that wake there? that 's where she 's gone under. Get up, Mouche! the otter heard monsieur talking, and now she 's scary enough to keep us at her heels till midnight. Come, let 's be off! and good-bye to our thirty francs!"

Mouche got up reluctantly; he looked at the spot where the water bubbled, pointed to it with his finger and seemed unable to give up all hope. The child, with curly hair and a brown face, like the angels in a fifteenth-century picture, seemed to be in breeches, for his trousers ended at the knee in a ragged fringe of brambles and dead leaves. This necessary garment was fastened upon him by cords of tarred oakum in guise of braces. A shirt of the same burlap which made the old man's trousers, thickened, however, by many darns, open in front showed a sun-burnt little breast. In short, the attire of the being called Mouche was even more startlingly simple than that of Père Fourchon.

"What a good-natured set of people they are here," thought Blondet; "if a man frightened away the game



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of the people of the suburbs of Paris, how their tongues would maul him!"

As he had never seen an otter, even in a museum, he was delighted with this episode of his early walk. "Come," said he, quite touched when the old man walked away without asking him for a compensation, "you say you are a famous otter catcher. If you are sure there is an otter down there — "

From the other side the water Mouche pointed his finger to certain air-bubbles coming up from the bottom of the Avonne and bursting on its surface.

"It has come back!" said Père Fourchon; "don't you see it breathe, the beggar? How do you suppose they manage to breathe at the bottom of the water? Ah, the creature's so clever it laughs at science."

"Well," said Blondet, who supposed the last word was a jest of the peasantry in general rather than of this peasant in particular, "wait and catch the otter."

"And what are we to do about our day's work, Mouche and I?"

"What is your day worth?"

"For the pair of us, my apprentice and me? — Five francs," said the old man, looking Blondet in the eye with a hesitation that betrayed an enormous overcharge.

The journalist took ten francs from his pocket, saying, "There 's ten, and I 'll give you ten more for the otter."

"And it won't cost you dear if there 's white on its back; for the sub-prefect told me there was n't one o' them museums that had the like; but he knows everything, our sub-prefect, — no fool he! If I hunt the otter, he, M'sieur des Lupeaulx, hunts Mademoiselle

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Gaubertin, who has a fine white *dot* on her back. Come now, my good gentleman, if I may make so bold, plunge into the middle of the Avonne and get to that stone down there. If we head the otter off, it will come down stream; for just see their slyness, the beggars! they always go above their burrow to feed, for, once full of fish, they know they can easily drift down, the sly things! Ha! if I'd been trained in their school I should be living now on an income; but I was a long time finding out that you must go up stream very early in the morning if you want to bag the game before others. Well, somebody threw a spell over me when I was born. However, we three together ought to be slyer than the otter."

"How so, my old necromancer?"

"Why, bless you! we are as stupid as the beasts, and so we come to understand the beasts. Now, see, this is what we'll do. When the otter wants to get home Mouche and I'll frighten it here, and you'll frighten it over there; frightened by us and frightened by you it will jump on the bank, and when it takes to earth, it is lost! It can't run; it has web feet for swimming. Ho, ho! it will make you laugh, such floundering! you don't know whether you are fishing or hunting! The general up at Les Aigues, I have known him to stay here three days running, he was so bent on getting an otter."

Blondet, armed with a branch cut for him by the old man, who requested him to whip the water with it when he called to him, planted himself in the middle of the river by jumping from stone to stone.

"There, that will do, my good gentleman."

Blondet stood where he was told without remark-

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ing the lapse of time, for every now and then the old fellow made him a sign as much as to say that all was going well; and besides, nothing makes time go so fast as the expectation that quick action is to succeed the perfect stillness of watching.

"Père Fourchon," whispered the boy, finding himself alone with the old man, "there's *really* an otter!"

"Do you see it?"

"There, see there!"

The old fellow was dumfounded at beholding under water the reddish-brown fur of an actual otter.

"It's coming my way!" said the child.

"Hit him a sharp blow on the head and jump into the water and hold him fast down, but don't let him go!"

Mouche dove into the river like a frightened frog.

"Come, come, my good gentleman," cried Père Fourchon to Blondet, jumping into the water and leaving his sabots on the bank, "frighten him! frighten him! Don't you see him? he is swimming fast your way!"

The old man dashed toward Blondet through the water, calling out with the gravity that country people retain in the midst of their greatest excitements:—

"Don't you see him there, there, along the rocks?"

Blondet, placed by direction of the old fellow in such a way that the sun was in his eyes, thrashed the water with much satisfaction to himself.

"Go on, go on!" cried Père Fourchon; "on the rock side; the burrow is there, to your left!"

Carried away by excitement and by his long waiting, Blondet slipped from the stones into the water.

"Ha! brave you are, my good gentleman! Twenty

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good Gods! I see him between your legs! you'll have him! — Ah! there! he's gone — he's gone!" cried the old man, in despair.

Then, in the fury of the chase, the old fellow plunged into the deepest part of the stream in front of Blondet.

"It's your fault we've lost him!" he cried, as Blondet gave him a hand to pull him out, dripping like a triton, and a vanquished triton. "The rascal, I see him, under those rocks! He has let go his fish," continued Fourchon, pointing to something that floated on the surface. "We'll have that at any rate; it's a tench, a real tench."

Just then a groom in livery on horseback and leading another horse by the bridle galloped up the road toward Conches.

"See! there's the château people sending after you," said the old man. "If you want to cross back again I'll give you a hand. I don't mind about getting wet; it saves washing!"

"How about rheumatism?"

"Rheumatism! don't you see the sun has browned our legs, Mouche and me, like tobacco-pipes. Here, lean on me, my good gentleman — you're from Paris; you don't know, though you *do* know so much, how to walk on our rocks. If you stay here long enough, you'll learn a deal that's written in the book o' nature, — you who write, so they tell me, in the newspapers."

Blondet had reached the bank before Charles, the groom, perceived him.

"Ah, monsieur!" he cried; "you don't know how anxious Madame has been since she heard you had gone through the gate of Conches; she was afraid you were drowned. They have rung the great bell

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three times, and Monsieur le curé is hunting for you in the park."

"What time is it, Charles?"

"A quarter to twelve."

"Help me to mount."

"Ha!" exclaimed the groom, noticing the water that dripped from Blondet's boots and trousers, "has monsieur been taken in by Père Fourchon's otter?"

The words enlightened the journalist.

"Don't say a word about it, Charles," he cried, "and I'll make it all right with you."

"Oh, as for that!" answered the man, "Monsieur le comte himself has been taken in by that otter. Whenever a visitor comes to Les Aigues, Père Fourchon sets himself on the watch, and if the gentleman goes to see the sources of the Avonne he sells him the otter; he plays the trick so well that Monsieur le comte has been here three times and paid him for six days' work, just to stare at the water!"

"Heavens!" thought Blondet. "And I imagined I had seen the greatest comedians of the present day! —Potier, the younger Baptiste, Michot, and Monrose. What are they compared to that old beggar?"

"He is very knowing at the business, Père Fourchon is," continued Charles; "and he has another string to his bow, besides. He calls himself a rope-maker, and has a walk under the park wall by the gate of Blangy. If you merely touch his rope he'll entangle you so cleverly that you will want to turn the wheel and make a bit of it yourself; and for that you would have to pay a fee for apprenticeship. Madame herself was taken in, and gave him twenty francs. Ah! he is the king of tricks, that old fellow!"

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The groom's gossip set Blondet thinking of the extreme craftiness and wiliness of the French peasant, of which he had heard a great deal from his father, a judge at Alençon. Then the satirical meaning hidden beneath Père Fourchon's apparent guilelessness came back to him, and he owned himself "gulled" by the Burgundian beggar.

"You would never believe, monsieur," said Charles, as they reached the portico at Les Aigues, "how much one is forced to distrust everybody and everything in the country, — especially here, where the general is not much liked —"

"Why not?"

"That 's more than I know," said Charles, with the stupid air servants assume to shield themselves when they wish not to answer their superiors, which nevertheless gave Blondet a good deal to think of.

"Here you are, truant!" cried the general, coming out on the terrace when he heard the horses. "Here he is; don't be uneasy!" he called back to his wife, whose little footfalls were heard behind him. "Now the Abbé Brossette is missing. Go and find him, Charles," he said to the groom.

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## III.

### THE TAVERN.

The gate of Blangy, built by Bouret, was formed of two wide pilasters of projecting rough-hewn stone; each surmounted by a dog sitting on his haunches and holding an escutcheon between his fore paws. The proximity of a small house where the steward lived dispensed with the necessity for a lodge. Between the two pilasters, a sumptuous iron gate, like those made in Buffon's time for the Jardin des Plantes, opened on a short paved way which led to the county road (formerly kept in careful order by Les Aigues and the Soulanges family) which unites Conches, Cerneux, Blangy, and Soulanges to Ville-aux-Fayes, like a wreath, for the whole road is lined with flowering hedges and little houses covered with roses and honey-suckle and other climbing plants.

There, along a pretty wall which extends as far as a terrace from which the land of Les Aigues falls rapidly to the valley till it meets that of Soulanges, are the rotten posts, the old wheel, and the forked stakes which constituted the manufactory of the village rope-maker.

Soon after midday, while Blondet was seating himself at table opposite the Abbé Brossette and receiving the tender expostulations of the countess, Père Fourchon and Mouche arrived at this establishment. From that

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vantage-ground Père Fourchon, under pretence of rope-making, could watch Les Aigues and see every one who went in and out. Nothing escaped him, the opening of the blinds, tête-à-tête loiterings, or the least little incidents of country life, were spied upon by the old fellow, who had set up this business only within the last three years, — a trifling circumstance which neither the masters, nor the servants, nor the keepers of Les Aigues had as yet remarked upon.

"Go round to the house by the gate of the Avonne while I put away the tackle," said Père Fourchon to his attendant, "and when you have blabbed about the thing, they 'll no doubt send after me to the Grand-I-Vert, where I am going for a drop of drink, — for it makes one thirsty enough to wade in the water that way. If you do just as I tell you, you 'll hook a good breakfast out of them; try to meet the countess, and give a slap at me, and that will put it into her head to come and preach morality or something! There 's lots of good wine to get out of it."

After these last instructions, which the sly look in Mouche's face rendered quite superfluous, the old peasant, hugging the otter under his arm, disappeared along the county road.

Half-way between the gate and the village there stood, at the time when Émile Blondet stayed at Les Aigues, one of those houses which are never seen but in parts of France where stone is scarce. Bits of bricks picked up anywhere, cobblestones set like diamonds in the clay mud, formed very solid walls, though worn in places; the roof was supported by stout branches and covered with rushes and straw, while the clumsy shutters and the broken door — in short, everything about

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the cottage was the product of lucky finds, or of gifts obtained by begging.

The peasant has an instinct for his habitation like that of an animal for its nest or its burrow, and this instinct was very marked in all the arrangements of this cottage. In the first place, the door and the window looked to the north. The house, placed on a little rise in the stoniest angle of a vineyard, was certainly healthful. It was reached by three steps, carefully made with stakes and planks filled in with broken stone and gravel, so that the water ran off rapidly; and as the rain seldom comes from the northward in Burgundy, no dampness could rot the foundations, slight as they were. Below the steps and along the path ran a rustic paling, hidden beneath a hedge of hawthorn and sweet-brier. An arbor, with a few clumsy tables and wooden benches, filled the space between the cottage and the road, and invited the passers-by to rest themselves. At the upper end of the bank by the house roses grew, and wall-flowers, violets, and other flowers that cost nothing. Jessamine and honey-suckle had fastened their tendrils on the roof, mossy already, though the building was far from old.

To the right of the house, the owner had built a stable for two cows. In front of this erection of old boards, a sunken piece of ground served as a yard where, in a corner, was a huge manure-heap. On the other side of the house and the arbor stood a thatched shed, supported on trunks of trees, under which the various outdoor properties of the peasantry were put away, — the utensils of the vine-dressers, their empty casks, logs of wood piled about a mound which contained the oven, the mouth of which opened, as was usual in the houses

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of the peasantry, under the mantle-piece of the chimney in the kitchen.

About an acre of land adjoined the house, inclosed by an evergreen hedge and planted with grape-vines; tended as peasants tend them, — that is to say, well-manured, and dug round, and layered so that they usually set their fruit before the vines of the large proprietors in a circuit of ten miles round. A few trees, almond, plum, and apricot, showed their slim heads here and there in this enclosure. Between the rows of vines potatoes and beans were planted. In addition to all this, on the side towards the village and beyond the yard was a bit of damp low ground, favorable for the growth of cabbages and onions (favorite vegetables of the working-classes), which was closed by a wooden gate, through which the cows were driven, trampling the path into mud and covering it with dung.

The house, which had two rooms on the ground-floor, opened upon the vineyard. On this side an outer stairway, roofed with thatch and resting against the wall of the house, led up to the garret, which was lighted by one round window. Under this rustic stairway opened a cellar built of Burgundy brick, containing several casks of wine.

Though the kitchen utensils of the peasantry are usually only two, namely, a frying-pan and an iron pot, with which they manage to do all their cooking, exceptions to this rule, in the shape of two enormous saucepans hanging beneath the mantle-shelf and above a small portable stove, were to be seen in this cottage. In spite, however, of this indication of luxury, the furniture was in keeping with the external appearance of the place. A jar held water, the spoons were of

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wood or pewter, the dishes, of red clay without and white within, were scaling off and had been mended with pewter rivets; the heavy table and chairs were of pine wood, and for flooring there was nothing better than the hardened earth. Every fifth year the walls received a coat of white-wash and so did the narrow beams of the ceiling, from which hung bacon, strings of onions, bundles of tallow candles, and the bags in which a peasant keeps his seeds; near the bread-box stood an old-fashioned wardrobe in walnut, where the scanty household linen, and the one change of garments together with the holiday attire of the family were kept.

Above the mantel of the chimney gleamed a poacher's old gun, not worth five francs, — the wood scorched, the barrel to all appearance never cleaned. An observer might reflect that the protection of a hovel with only a latch, and an outer gate that was only a paling and never closed, needed no better weapon; but still the wonder was to what use it was put. In the first place, though the wood was of the commonest kind, the barrel was carefully selected, and came from a valuable gun, given in all probability to a game-keeper. Moreover, the owner of this weapon never missed his aim; there was between him and his gun the same intimate acquaintance that there is between a workman and his tool. If the muzzle must be raised or lowered the merest fraction in its aim, because it carries just an atom above or below the range, the poacher knows it; he obeys the rule and never misses. An officer of artillery would have found the essential parts of this weapon in good condition notwithstanding its uncleanly appearance. In all that the peasant appropriates to his use, in all that serves him, he displays just the

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amount of force that is needed, neither more nor less; he attends to the essential and to nothing beyond. External perfection he has no conception of. An unerring judge of the necessary in all things, he thoroughly understands degrees of strength, and knows very well when working for an employer how to give the least possible for the most he can get. This contemptible-looking gun will be found to play a serious part in the life of the family inhabiting this cottage, and you will presently learn how and why.

Have you now taken in all the many details of this hovel, planted about five hundred feet away from the pretty gate of Les Aigues? Do you see it crouching there, like a beggar beside a palace? Well, its roof covered with velvet mosses, its clacking hens, its grunting pig, its straying heifer, all its rural graces have a horrible meaning.

Fastened to a pole, which was stuck in the ground beside the entrance through the fence, was a withered bunch of three pine branches and some old oak-leaves tied together with a rag. Above the door of the house a roving artist had painted, probably in return for his breakfast, a huge capital "I" in green on a white ground two feet square; and for the benefit of those who could read, this witty joke in twelve letters: "Au Grand-I-Vert" (hiver). On the left of the door was a vulgar sign bearing, in colored letters, "Good March beer," and the picture of a foaming pot of the same, with a woman, in a dress excessively low-necked, on one side, and an hussar on the other, — both coarsely colored. Consequently, in spite of the blooming flowers and the fresh country air, this cottage exhaled the same strong and nauseous odor of wine and food which assails you

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in Paris as you pass the door of the cheap cook-shops of the faubourg.

Now you know the surroundings. Behold the inhabitants and hear their history, which contains more than one lesson for philanthropists.

The proprietor of the Grand-I-Vert, named François Tonsard, commends himself to the attention of philosophers by the manner in which he had solved the problem of an idle life and a busy life, so as to make idleness profitable, and occupation nil.

A jack-at-all-trades, he knew how to cultivate the ground, but for himself only. For others, he dug ditches, gathered fagots, barked the trees, or cut them down. In all such work the employer is at the mercy of the workman. Tonsard owed his plot of ground to the generosity of Mademoiselle Laguerre. In his early youth he had worked by the day for the gardener at Les Aigues; and he really had not his equal in trimming the shrubbery-trees, the hedges, the hornbeams, and the horse-chestnuts. His very name shows hereditary talent. In remote country-places privileges exist which are obtained and preserved with as much care as the merchants of a city display in getting theirs. Mademoiselle Laguerre was one day walking in the garden, when she overheard Tonsard, then a strapping fellow, say, "All I need to live on, and live happily, is an acre of land." The kind creature, accustomed to make others happy, gave him the acre of vineyard near the gate of Blangy, in return for one hundred days' work (a delicate regard for his feelings which was little understood), and allowed him to stay at Les Aigues, where he lived with her servants, who thought him one of the best fellows in Burgundy.

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Poor Tonsard (that is what everybody called him) worked about thirty days out of the hundred that he owed; the rest of the time he idled about, talking and laughing with Mademoiselle's women, particularly with Mademoiselle Cochet, the lady's maid, though she was ugly, like all confidential maids of handsome actresses. Laughing with Mademoiselle Cochet signified so many things that Soudry, the fortunate gendarme mentioned in Blondet's letter, still looked askance at Tonsard after the lapse of nearly twenty-five years. The walnut wardrobe, the bedstead with the tester and curtains, and the ornaments about the bedroom were doubtless the result of the said laughter.

Once in possession of his acre, Tonsard replied to the first person who happened to mention that Mademoiselle Laguerre had given it to him, "I've bought it deuced hard, and paid well for it. Do rich folks ever give us anything? Are one hundred days' work nothing? It has cost me three hundred francs, and the land is all stones." But that speech never got beyond the regions of his own class.

Tonsard built his house himself, picking up the materials here and there as he could, — getting a day's work out of this one and that one, gleaning in the rubbish that was thrown away, often asking for things and always obtaining them. A discarded door cut in two for convenience in carrying away became the door of the stable; the window was the sash of a greenhouse. In short, the rubbish of the château, served to build the fatal cottage.

Saved from the draft by Gaubertin, the steward of Les Aigues, whose father was prosecuting-attorney of the department, and who, moreover, could refuse

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nothing to Mademoiselle Cochet, Tonsard married as soon as his house was finished and his vines had begun to bear. A well-grown fellow of twenty-three, in everybody's good graces at Les Aigues, on whom Mademoiselle had bestowed an acre of her land, and who appeared to be a good worker, he had the art to ring the praises of his negative merits, and so obtained the daughter of a farmer on the Ronquerolles estate, which lies beyond the forest of Les Aigues.

This farmer held the lease of half a farm, which was going to ruin in his hands for want of a helpmate. A widower, and inconsolable for the loss of his wife, he tried to drown his troubles, like the English, in wine, and then, when he had put the poor deceased out of his mind, he found himself married, so the village maliciously declared, to a woman named Boisson. From being a farmer he became once more a laborer, but an idle and drunken laborer, quarrelsome and vindictive, capable of any ill-deed, like most of his class when they fall from a well-to-do state of life into poverty. This man, whose practical information and knowledge of reading and writing placed him far above his fellow-workmen, while his vices kept him at the level of pauperism, you have already seen on the banks of the Avonne, measuring his cleverness with that of one of the cleverest men in Paris, in a bucolic overlooked by Virgil.

Père Fourchon, formerly a schoolmaster at Blangy, lost that place through misconduct and his singular ideas as to public education. He helped the children to make paper boats with their alphabets much oftener than he taught them to spell; he scolded them in so remarkable a manner for pilfering fruit that his lectures might really have passed for lessons on the best

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way of scaling the walls. From teacher he became a postman. In this capacity, which serves as a refuge to many an old soldier, Père Fourchon was daily reprimanded. Sometimes he forgot the letters in a tavern, at other times he kept them in his pocket. When he was drunk he left those for one village in another village; when he was sober he read them. Consequently, he was soon dismissed. No longer able to serve the State, Père Fourchon ended by becoming a manufacturer. In the country a poor man can always get something to do, and make at least a pretence of gaining an honest livelihood. At sixty-eight years of age the old man started his rope-walk, a manufactory which requires the very smallest capital. The workshop is, as we have seen, any convenient wall; the machinery costs about ten francs. The apprentice slept, like his master, in a hay-loft, and lived on whatever he could pick up. The rapacity of the law in the matter of doors and windows expires *sub dio*. The tow to make the first rope can be borrowed. But the principal revenue of Père Fourchon and his satellite Mouche, the natural son of one of his natural daughters, came from the otters; and then there were breakfasts and dinners given them by peasants who could neither read nor write, and were glad to use the old fellow's talents when they had a bill to make out, or a letter to dispatch. Besides all this, he knew how to play the clarionet, and he went about with his friend Vermichel, the miller of Soulanges, to village weddings and the grand balls given at the Tivoli of Soulanges.

Vermichel's name was Michel Vert, but the transposition was so generally used that Brunet, the clerk of the municipal court of Soulanges, was in the habit of writ



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ing Michel-Jean-Jérôme Vert, called Vermichel, practitioner. Vermichel, a famous violin in the Burgundian regiment of former days, had procured for Père Fourchon, in recognition of certain services, a situation as practitioner, which in remote country-places usually devolves on those who are able to sign their name. Père Fourchon therefore added to his other avocations that of witness, or practitioner of legal papers, whenever the Sieur Brunet came to draw them in the districts of Cerneux, Conches, and Blangy. Vermichel and Fourchon, allied by a friendship of twenty years' tippling, might really be considered a business firm.

Mouche and Fourchon, bound together by vice as Mentor and Telemachus by virtue, travelled like the latter, in search of their father, *panis angelorum*, — the only Latin words which the old fellow's memory had retained. They went about scraping up the pickings of the Grand-I-Vert, and those of the adjacent châteaux; for between them, in their busiest and most prosperous years, they had never contrived to make as much as three hundred and sixty fathom of rope. In the first place, no dealer within a radius of fifty miles would have trusted his tow to either Mouche or Fourchon. The old man, surpassing the miracles of modern chemistry, knew too well how to resolve the tow into the all-benignant juice of the grape. Moreover, his triple functions of public writer for three townships, legal practitioner for one, and clarionet-player at large, hindered, so he said, the development of his business.

Thus it happened that Tonsard was disappointed from the start in the hope he had indulged of increasing his comfort by an increase of property in marriage. The idle son-in-law had chanced, by a very common

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accident, on an idler father-in-law. Matters went all the worse because Tonsard's wife, gifted with a sort of rustic beauty, being tall and well-made, was not fond of work in the open air. Tonsard blamed his wife for her father's short-comings, and ill-treated her, with the customary revenge of the common people, whose minds take in only an effect and rarely look back to causes.

Finding her fetters heavy, the woman lightened them. She used Tonsard's vices to get the better of him. Loving comfort and good eating herself, she encouraged his idleness and gluttony. In the first place, she managed to procure the good-will of the servants of the château, and Tonsard, in view of the results, made no complaint as to the means. He cared very little what his wife did, so long as she did all he wanted of her. That is the secret agreement of many a household. Madame Tonsard established the wine-shop of the Grand-I-Vert, her first customers being the servants of Les Aigues and the keepers and huntsmen.

Gaubertin, formerly steward to Mademoiselle Laguerre, one of La Tonsard's chief patrons, gave her several puncheons of excellent wine to attract custom. The effect of these gifts (continued as long as Gaubertin remained a bachelor) and the fame of her rather lawless beauty commended this woman to the Don Juans of the valley, and filled the wine-shop of the Grand-I-Vert. Being a lover of good eating, La Tonsard was naturally an excellent cook; and though her talents were only exercised on the common dishes of the country, jugged hare, game sauce, stewed fish and omelets, she was considered in all the country round to be an admirable cook of the sort of food which is eaten at a counter and

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spiced in a way to excite a desire for drink. By the end of two years, she had managed to rule Tonsard, and turn him to evil courses, which, indeed, he asked no better than to indulge in.

The rascal was continually poaching, and with nothing to fear from it. The intimacies of his wife with Gaubertin and the keepers and the rural authorities, together with the laxity of the times, secured him impunity. As soon as his children were large enough he made them serviceable to his comfort, caring no more for their morality than for that of his wife. He had two sons and two daughters. Tonsard, who lived, as did his wife, from hand to mouth, might have come to an end of this easy life if he had not maintained a sort of martial law over his family, which compelled them to work for the preservation of it. When he had brought up his children, at the cost of those from whom his wife was able to extort gifts, the following charter and budget were the law at the Grand-I-Vert.

Tonsard's old mother and his two daughters, Catherine and Marie, went into the woods at certain seasons twice a-day, and came back laden with fagots which overhung the crutch of their poles at least two feet beyond their heads. Though dried sticks were placed on the outside of the heap, the inside was made of live wood cut from the young trees. In plain words, Tonsard helped himself to his winter's fuel in the woods of Les Aigues. Besides this, father and sons were constantly poaching. From September to March, hares, rabbits, partridges, deer, in short, all the game that was not eaten at the château, was sold at Blangy and at Soulanges, where Tonsard's two daughters peddled milk in the early mornings, — coming back with the news of

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the day, in return for the gossip they carried about Les Aigues, and Cerneux, and Conches. In the months when the three Tonsards were unable to hunt with a gun, they set traps. If the traps caught more game than they could eat, La Tonsard made pies of it and sent them to Ville-aux-Fayes. In harvest-time seven Tonsards — the old mother, the two sons (until they were seventeen years of age), the two daughters, together with old Fourchon and Mouche — gleaned, and generally brought in about sixteen bushels a day of all grains, rye, barley, wheat, all good to grind.

The two cows, led to the roadside by the youngest girl, always managed to stray into the meadows of Les Aigues; but as, if it ever chanced that some too flagrant trespass compelled the keepers to take notice of it, the children were either whipped or deprived of a coveted dainty, they had acquired such extraordinary aptitude in hearing the enemy's footfall that the bailiff or the park-keeper of Les Aigues was very seldom able to detect them. Besides, the relations of those estimable functionaries with Tonsard and his wife tied a bandage over their eyes. The cows, held by long ropes, obeyed a mere twitch or a special low call back to the roadside, knowing very well that, the danger once past, they could finish their browsing in the next field. Old mother Tonsard, who was getting more and more infirm, succeeded Mouche in his duties, after Fourchon, under pretence of caring for his natural grandson's education, kept him to himself; while Marie and Catherine made hay in the woods. These girls knew the exact spots where the fine forest-grass abounded, and there they cut and spread and cocked and garnered it, supplying two thirds, at least, of the

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winter fodder, and leading the cows on all fine days to sheltered nooks where they could still find pasture. In certain parts of the valley of Les Aigues, as in all places protected by a chain of mountains, in Piedmont and in Lombardy for instance, there are spots where the grass keeps green all the year. Such fields, called in Italy *marciti*, are of great value; though in France they are often in danger of being injured by snow and ice. This phenomenon is due, no doubt, to some favorable exposure, and to the infiltration of water which keeps the ground at a warmer temperature.

The calves were sold for about eighty francs. The milk, deducting the time when the cows calved or went dry, brought in about one hundred and sixty francs a year besides supplying the wants of the family. Tonsard himself managed to earn another hundred and sixty by doing odd jobs of one kind or another.

The sale of food and wine in the tavern, after all costs were paid, returned a profit of about three hundred francs, for the great drinking-bouts happened only at certain times and in certain seasons; and as the topers who indulged in them gave Tonsard and his wife due notice, the latter bought in the neighboring town the exact quantity of provisions needed and no more. The wine produced by Tonsard's vineyard was sold in ordinary years for twenty francs a cask to a wine-dealer at Soulanges with whom Tonsard was intimate. In very prolific years he got as much as twelve casks from his vines, but eight was the average; and Tonsard kept half for his own traffic. In all wine-growing districts the gleaning of the large vineyards gives a good perquisite, and out of it the Tonsard family usually managed to obtain three casks more. But

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being, as we have seen, sheltered and protected by the keepers, they showed no conscience in their proceedings, — entering vineyards before the harvesters were out of them, just as they swarmed into the wheat-fields before the sheaves were made. So, the seven or eight casks of wine, as much gleaned as harvested, were sold for a good price. However, out of these various proceeds the Grand-I-Vert was mulcted in a good sum for the personal consumption of Tonsard and his wife, who wanted the best of everything to eat, and better wine than they sold, — which they obtained from their friend at Soulanges in payment for their own. In short, the money scraped together by this family amounted to about nine hundred francs, for they fattened two pigs a year, one for themselves and the other to sell.

The idlers and scapegraces and also the laborers took a fancy to the tavern of the Grand-I-Vert, partly because of La Tonsard's merits, and partly on account of the hail-fellow-well-met relation existing between this family and the lower classes of the valley. The two daughters, both remarkably handsome, followed the example of their mother as to morals. Moreover, the long established fame of the Grand-I-Vert, dating from 1795, made it a venerable spot in the eyes of the common people. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, workmen came there to meet and make their bargains and hear the news collected by the Tonsard women and by Mouche and old Fourchon, or supplied by Vermichel and Brunet, that renowned official, when he came to the tavern in search of his practitioner. There the price of hay and of wine was settled; also that of a day's work and of piece-work. Tonsard, a sovereign judge in such matters, gave his advice and opinion while drink-

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ing with his guests. Soulanges, according to a saying in these parts, was a town for society and amusement only, while Blangy was a business borough; crushed, however, by the great commercial centre of Ville-aux-Fayes, which had become in the last twenty-five years the capital of this flourishing valley. The cattle and grain market was held at Blangy, in the public square, and the prices there obtained served as a tariff for the whole arrondissement.

By staying in the house and doing no out-door work, La Tonsard continued fresh and fair and dimpled, in comparison with the women who worked in the fields and faded as rapidly as the flowers, becoming old and haggard before they were thirty. She liked to be well-dressed. In point of fact, she was only clean, but in a village cleanliness is luxury. The daughters, better dressed than their means warranted, followed their mother's example. Beneath their outer garment, which was relatively handsome, they wore linen much finer than that of the richest peasant women. On fête-days they appeared in dresses that were really pretty, obtained, Heaven knows how! For one thing, the men-servants at Les Aigues sold to them, at prices that were easily paid, the cast-off clothing of the lady's-maids, which, after sweeping the streets of Paris and being made over to fit Marie and Catherine, appeared triumphantly in the precincts of the Grand-I-Vert. These girls, bohemians of the valley, received not one penny in money from their parents, who gave them their food only, and the wretched pallets on which they slept with their grandmother in the barn, where their brothers also slept, curled up in the hay like animals. Neither father nor mother paid any heed to this propinquity.

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The iron age and the age of gold are more alike than we think for. In the one nothing aroused vigilance; in the other, everything rouses it; the result to society is, perhaps, very much the same. The presence of old Mother Tonsard, which was more a necessity than a precaution, was simply one immorality the more. And thus it was that the Abbé Brossette, after studying the morals of his parishioners, made this pregnant remark to his bishop: —

"Monseigneur, when I observe the stress that the peasantry lay on their poverty, I realize how they fear to lose that excuse for their immorality."

Though everybody knew that the family had no principles and no scruples, nothing was ever said against the morals of the Grand-I-Vert. At the beginning of this book it is necessary to explain, once for all, to persons accustomed to the decencies of middle-class life, that the peasants have no decency in their domestic habits and customs. They make no appeal to morality when their daughters are seduced, unless the seducer is rich and timid. Children, until the State takes possession of them, are used either as capital or as instruments of convenience. Self-interest has become, specially since 1789, the sole motive of the masses; they never ask if an action is legal or immoral, but only if it is profitable. Morality, which is not to be confounded with religion, begins only at a certain competence, — just as one sees, in a higher sphere, how delicacy blossoms in the soul when fortune decorates the furniture. A positively moral and upright man is rare among the peasantry. Do you ask why? Among the many reasons that may be given for this state of things, the principal one is this: Through the nature

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of their social functions, the peasants live a purely material life which approximates to that of savages, and their constant union with nature tends to foster it. When toil exhausts the body it takes from the mind its purifying action, especially among the ignorant. The Abbé Brossette was right in saying that the state policy of the peasant is his poverty.

Meddling in everybody's interests, Tonsard heard everybody's complaints, and often instigated frauds to benefit the needy. His wife, a kindly appearing woman, had a good word for evil-doers, and never withheld either approval or personal help from her customers in anything they undertook against the rich. This inn, a nest of vipers, brisk and venomous, seething and active, was a hot-bed for the hatred of the peasants and the workingmen against the masters and the wealthy.

The prosperous life of the Tonsards was, therefore, an evil example. Others asked themselves why they should not take their wood, as the Tonsards did, from the forest; why not pasture their cows and have game to eat and to sell as well as they; why not harvest without sowing the grapes and the grain. Accordingly, the pilfering thefts which thin the woods and tithe the ploughed lands and meadows and vineyards became habitual in this valley, and soon existed as a right throughout the districts of Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux, all adjacent to the domain of Les Aigues. This sore, for certain reasons which will be given in due time, did far greater injury to Les Aigues than to the estates of Ronquerolles or Soulanges. You must not, however, fancy that Tonsard, his wife and children, and his old mother ever deliberately said to themselves, "We will live by theft, and commit it as cleverly as we can."

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Such habits grow slowly. To the dried sticks they added, in the first instance, a single bit of good wood; then, emboldened by habit and a carefully prepared immunity (necessary to plans which this history will unfold), they ended at last in cutting "their wood," and stealing almost their entire livelihood. Pasturage for the cows and the abuses of gleaning were established as customs little by little. When the Tonsards and the do-nothings of the valley had tasted the sweets of these four rights (thus captured by rural paupers, and amounting to actual robbery) we can easily imagine they would never give them up unless compelled by a power greater than their own audacity.

At the time when this history begins Tonsard, then about fifty years of age, tall and strong, rather stout than thin, with curly black hair, skin highly colored and marbled like a brick with purple blotches, yellow whites to the eyes, large ears with broad flaps, a muscular frame, encased, however, in flabby flesh, a retreating forehead, and a hanging lip, — Tonsard, such as you see him, hid his real character under an external stupidity, lightened at times by a show of experience, which seemed all the more intelligent because he had acquired in the company of his father-in-law a sort of bantering talk, much affected by old Fourchon and Vermichel. His nose, flattened at the end as if the finger of God intended to mark him, gave him a voice which came from his palate, like that of all persons disfigured by a disease which thickens the nasal passages, through which the air then passes with difficulty. His upper teeth overlapped each other, and this defect (which Lavater calls terrible) was all the more apparent because they were as white as those of a dog. But

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for a certain lawless and slothful good humor, and the free-and-easy ways of a rustic tippler, the man would have alarmed the least observing of spectators.

If the portraits of Tonsard, his inn, and his father-in-law take a prominent place in this history, it is because that place belongs to him and to the inn and to the family. In the first place, their existence, so minutely described, is the type of a hundred other households in the valley of Les Aigues. Secondly, Tonsard, without being other than the instrument of deep and active hatreds, had an immense influence on the struggle that was about to take place, being the friend and counsellor of all the complainants of the lower classes. His inn, as we shall presently see, was the rendezvous for the aggressors; in fact, he became their chief, partly on account of the fear he inspired throughout the valley — less, however, by his actual deeds than by those that were constantly expected of him. The threat of this man was as much dreaded as the thing threatened, so that he never had occasion to execute it.

Every revolt, open or concealed, has its banner. The banner of the marauders, the drunkards, the idlers, the sluggards of the valley des Aigues was the terrible tavern of the Grand-I-Vert. Its frequenters found amusement there, — as rare and much-desired a thing in the country as in a city. Moreover, there was no other inn along the country-road for over twelve miles, a distance which conveyances (even when laden) could easily do in three hours; so that those who went from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes always stopped at the Grand-I-Vert, if only to refresh themselves. The miller of Les Aigues, who was also assistant-mayor, and his men came there. The grooms and valets of the gen-

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eral were not averse to Tonsard's wine, rendered attractive by Tonsard's daughters; so the Grand-I-Vert held subterraneous communication with the château through the servants, and knew immediately everything that they knew. It is impossible either by benefits or through their own self-interests, to break up the perpetual understanding that exists between the servants of a household and the people from whom they come. Domestic service is of the masses, and to the masses it will ever remain attached. This fatal comradeship explains the reticence of the last words of Charles the groom, as he and Blondet reached the portico of the château.

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## IV.

### ANOTHER IDYL.

"Ha! by my pipe, papa!" exclaimed Tonsard, seeing his father-in-law as the old man entered and supposing him in quest of food, "your stomach is lively this morning! We have n't anything to give you. How about that rope, — the rope, you know, you were to make for us? It is amazing how much you make over night and how little there is made in the morning! You ought long ago to have twisted the one that is to twist you out of existence; you are getting too costly for us."

The wit of a peasant or laborer is very Attic; it consists in speaking out his mind and giving it a grotesque expression. We find the same thing in a drawing-room. Delicacy of wit takes the place of picturesque vulgarity, and that is really all the difference there is.

"That 's enough for the father-in-law!" said the old man. "Talk business; I want a bottle of the best."

So saying, Fourchon rapped a five-franc piece that gleamed in his hand on the old table at which he was seated, — which, with its coating of grease, its scorched black marks, its wine stains, and its gashes, was singular to behold. At the sound of coin Marie Tonsard, as trig as a sloop about to start on a cruise, glanced at her grandfather with a covetous look that shot from her eyes like a spark. La Tonsard came out of her bedroom, attracted by the music of metal.

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"You are always rough to my poor father," she said to her husband, "and yet he has earned a deal of money this year; God grant he came by it honestly. Let me see that," she added, springing at the coin and snatching it from Fourchon's fingers.

"Marie," said Tonsard, gravely, "above the board you 'll find some bottled wine. Go and get a bottle."

Wine is of only one quality in the country, but it is sold as of two kinds, — cask wine and bottled wine.

"Where did you get this, papa?" demanded La Tonsard, slipping the coin into her pocket.

"Philippine! you 'll come to a bad end," said the old man, shaking his head but not attempting to recover his money. Doubtless he had long realized the futility of a struggle between his daughter, his terrible son-in-law, and himself.

"Another bottle of wine for which you get five francs out of me," he added, in a peevish tone. "But it shall be the last. I shall give my custom to the Café de la Paix."

"Hold your tongue, papa!" remarked his fair and fat daughter, who bore some resemblance to a Roman matron. "You need a shirt, and a pair of clean trousers, and a hat; and I want to see you with a waistcoat. That 's what I take the money for."

"I have told you again and again that such things would ruin me," said the old man. "People would think me rich and stop giving me anything."

The bottle brought by Marie put an end to the loquacity of the old man, who was not without that trait, characteristic of those whose tongues are ready to tell out everything, and who shrink from no expression of their thought, no matter how atrocious it may be.

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"Then you don't want to tell where you filched that money?" said Tonsard. "We might go and get more where that came from, — the rest of us."

He was making a snare, and as he finished it the ferocious innkeeper happened to glance at his father-in-law's trousers, and there he spied a raised round spot which clearly defined a second five-franc piece.

"Having become a capitalist I drink your health," said Père Fourchon.

"If you choose to be a capitalist you can be," said Tonsard; "you have the means, you have! But the devil has bored a hole in the back of your head through which everything runs out."

"Hey! I only played the otter trick on that young fellow they have got at Les Aigues. He 's from Paris. That 's all there is to it."

"If crowds of people would come to see the sources of the Avonne, you 'd be rich, Grandpa Fourchon," said Marie.

"Yes," he said, drinking the last glassful the bottle contained, "and I 've played the sham otter so long, the live otters have got angry, and one of them came right between my legs to-day; Mouche caught it, and I am to get twenty francs for it."

"I 'll bet your otter is made of tow," said Tonsard, looking slyly at his father-in-law.

"If you will give me a pair of trousers, a waistcoat, and some list braces, so as not to disgrace Vermichel on the music stand at Tivoli (for old Socquard is always scolding about my clothes), I 'll let you keep that money, my daughter; your idea is a good one. I can squeeze that rich young fellow at Les Aigues; may be he 'll take to otters."

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"Go and get another bottle," said Tonsard to his daughter. "If your father really had an otter, he would show it to us," he added, speaking to his wife and trying to touch up Fourchon.

"I'm too much afraid it would get into your frying-pan," said the old man, winking one of his little green eyes at his daughter. "Philippine has already hooked my five-franc piece; and how many more have n't you bagged under pretence of clothing me and feeding me? and now you say that my stomach is too lively, and that I go half-naked."

"You sold your last clothes to drink boiled wine at the Café de la Paix, papa," said his daughter, "though Vermichel tried to prevent it."

"Vermichel! the man I treated! Vermichel is incapable of betraying my friendship. It must have been that lump of old lard on two legs that he is not ashamed to call his wife!"

"He or she," replied Tonsard, "or Bonnébault."

"If it was Bonnébault," cried Fourchon, "he who is one of the pillars of the place, I'll — I'll — Enough!"

"You old sot, what has all that got to do with having sold your clothes? You sold them because you did sell them; you're of age!" said Tonsard, slapping the old man's knee. "Come, do honor to my drink and redden up your throat! The father of Mam Tonsard has a right to do so; and is n't that better than spending your silver at Socquard's?"

"What a shame it is that you have been fifteen years playing for people to dance at Tivoli and you have never yet found out how Socquard cooks his wine, — you who are so shrewd!" said his daughter; "and yet you know



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very well that if we had the secret we should soon get as rich as Rigou."

Throughout the Morvan, and in that region of Burgundy which lies at its feet on the side toward Paris, this boiled wine with which Mam Tonsard reproached her father is a rather costly beverage which plays a great part in the life of the peasantry, and is made by all grocers and wine-dealers, and wherever a drinking-shop exists. This precious liquor, made of choice wine, sugar, and cinnamon and other spices, is preferable to all those disguises or mixtures of brandy called ratafia, one-hundred-and-seven, brave man's cordial, black currant wine, vespétro, spirit-of-sun, etc. Boiled wine is found throughout France and Switzerland. Among the Jura, and in the wild districts trodden only by a few special tourists, the innkeepers call it, on the word of commercial travellers, the wine of Syracuse. Excellent it is, however, and their guests, hungry as hounds after ascending the surrounding peaks, very gladly pay three and four francs a bottle for it. In the homes of the Morvan and in Burgundy the least illness or the slightest agitation of the nerves is an excuse for boiled wine. Before and after childbirth the women take it with the addition of burnt sugar. Boiled wine has soaked up the property of many a peasant, and more than once the seductive liquid has been the cause of marital chastisement.

"Ha! there 's no chance of grabbing that secret," replied Fourchon, "Socquard always locks himself in when he boils his wine; he never told how he does it to his late wife. He sends to Paris for his materials."

"Don't plague your father," cried Tonsard; "does n't

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he know? well, then, he does n't know! People can't know everything!"

Fourchon grew very uneasy on seeing how his son-in-law's countenance softened as well as his words.

"What do you want to rob me of now?" he asked, candidly.

"I?" said Tonsard, "I take none but my legitimate dues; if I get anything from you it is in payment of your daughter's portion, which you promised me and have never paid."

Fourchon, reassured by the harshness of this remark, dropped his head on his breast as though vanquished and convinced.

"Look at that pretty snare," resumed Tonsard, coming up to his father-in-law and laying the trap upon his knee. "Some of these days they 'll want game at Les Aigues, and we shall sell them their own, or there will be no good God for the poor folks."

"A fine piece of work," said the old man, examining the mischievous machine.

"It is very well to pick up the sous now, papa," said Mam Tonsard, "but you know we are to have our share in the cake of Les Aigues."

"Oh, what chatterers women are!" cried Tonsard. "If I am hanged it won't be for a shot from my gun, but for the gabble of your tongue."

"And do you really suppose that Les Aigues will be cut up and sold in lots for your pitiful benefit?" asked Fourchon. "Pshaw! have n't you discovered in the last thirty years that old Rigou has been sucking the marrow out of your bones that the middle-class folks are worse than the lords? Mark my words, when that affair happens, my children, the Soudrys, the Gaubertins, the

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Rigous, will make you kick your heels in the air. 'I've the good tobacco, it never shall be thine,' that's the national air of the rich man, hey? The peasant will always be the peasant. Don't you see (but you never did understand anything of politics!) that government puts such heavy taxes on wine only to hinder our profits and keep us poor? The middle classes and the government, they are all one. What would become of them if everybody was rich? Could they till their fields? Would they gather the harvest? No, they *want* the poor! I was rich for ten years and I know what I thought of paupers."

"Must hunt with them, though," replied Tonsard, "because they mean to cut up the great estates; after that's done, we can turn against them. If I'd been Courtecuisse, whom that scoundrel Rigou is ruining, I'd have long ago paid his bill with other balls than the poor fellow gives him."

"Right enough, too," replied Fourchon. "As Père Niseron says (and he stayed republican long after everybody else), 'The people are tough; they don't die; they have time before them.'"

Fourchon fell into a sort of revery; Tonsard profited by his inattention to take back the trap, and as he took it up he cut a slip below the coin in his father-in-law's pocket at a moment when the old man raised his glass to his lips; then he set his foot on the five-franc piece as it dropped on the earthen floor just where it was always kept damp by the heel-taps which the customers flung from their glasses. Though quickly and lightly done, the old man might, perhaps, have felt the theft, if Vermichel had not happened to appear at that moment.

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"Tonsard, do you know where your father is?" called that functionary from the foot of the steps.

Vermichel's shout, the theft of the money, and the emptying of old Fourchon's glass, were simultaneous.

"Present, captain!" cried Fourchon, holding out a hand to Vermichel to help him up the steps.

Of all Burgundian figures, Vermichel would have seemed to you the most Burgundian. The practitioner was not red, he was scarlet. His face, like certain tropical portions of the globe, was fissured, here and there, with small extinct volcanoes, defined by flat and greenish patches which Fourchon called, not unpoetically, the "flowers of wine." This fiery face, the features of which were swelled out of shape by continual drunkenness, looked cyclopic; for it was lighted on the right side by a gleaming eye, and darkened on the other by a yellow patch over the left orb. Red hair, always tousled, and a beard like that of Judas, made Vermichel as formidable in appearance as he was meek in reality. His prominent nose looked like an interrogation-mark, to which the wide-slit mouth seemed to be always answering, even when it did not open. Vermichel, a short man, wore hob-nail shoes, bottle-green velveteen trousers, an old waistcoat patched with diverse stuffs which seemed to have been originally made of a counterpane, a jacket of coarse blue cloth and a gray hat with a broad brim. All this luxury, required by the town of Soulanges where Vermichel fulfilled the combined functions of porter at the town-hall, drummer, jailer, musician, and practitioner, was taken care of by Madame Vermichel, an alarming antagonist of Rabelaisian philosophy. This virago with moustachios, about one yard in width and one hundred and twenty kilo-

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grams in weight (but very active), ruled Vermichel with a rod of iron. Thrashed by her when drunk, he allowed her to thrash him still when sober; which caused Père Fourchon to say, with a sniff at Vermichel's clothes, "It is the livery of a slave."

"Talk of the sun and you 'll see its beams," cried Fourchon, repeating a well-worn allusion to the rutilant face of Vermichel, which really did resemble those copper suns painted on tavern signs in the provinces. "Has Mam Vermichel spied too much dust on your back, that you 're running away from your four-fifths, —for I can't call her your better half, that woman! What brings you here at this hour, drum-major?"

"Politics, always politics," replied Vermichel, who seemed accustomed to such pleasantries.

"Ah! business is bad in Blangy, and there 'll be notes to protest, and writs to issue," remarked Père Fourchon, filling a glass for his friend.

"That *ape* of ours is right behind me," replied Vermichel, with a backward gesture.

In workmen's slang "ape" meant master. The word belonged to the dictionary of the worthy pair.

"What 's Monsieur Brunet coming bothering about here?" asked Tonsard.

"Hey, by the powers, you folks!" said Vermichel, "you 've brought him in for the last three years more than you are worth. Ha! that master at Les Aigues, he has his eye upon you; he 'll punch you in the ribs; he 's after you, the Shopman! Brunet says, if there were three such landlords in the valley his fortune would be made."

"What new harm are they going to do to the poor?" asked Marie.

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"A pretty wise thing for themselves," replied Vermichel. "Faith! you 'll have to give in, in the end. How can you help it? They 've got the power. For the last two years have n't they had three foresters and a horse-patrol, all as active as ants, and a field-keeper who is a terror? Besides, the gendarmerie is ready to do their dirty work at any time. They 'll crush you —"

"Bah!" said Tonsard, "we are too flat. That which can't be crushed is n't the trees, it 's ground."

"Don't you trust to that," said Fourchon to his son-in-law; "you own property."

"Those rich folks must love you," continued Vermichel, "for they think of nothing else from morning till night! They are saying to themselves now like this: 'Their cattle eat up our pastures; we 'll seize their cattle; they can't eat grass themselves.' You 've all been condemned, the warrants are out, and they have told our ape to take your cows. We are to begin this morning at Conches by seizing old mother Bonnébault's cow and Godin's cow and Mitant's cow.

The moment the name of Bonnébault was mentioned, Marie, who was in love with the old woman's grandson, sprang into the vineyard with a nod to her father and mother. She slipped like an eel through a break in the hedge, and was off on the way to Conches with the speed of a hunted hare.

"They 'll do so much," remarked Tonsard, tranquilly, "that they 'll get their bones broken; and that will be a pity, for their mothers can't make them any new ones."

"Well, perhaps so," said old Fourchon, "but see here, Vermichel, I can't go with you for an hour or more, for I have important business at the château."

"More important than serving three warrants at

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five sous each? 'You should n't spit into the vintage,' as Father Noah says."

"I tell you, Vermichel, that my business requires me to go to the château des Aigues," repeated the old man, with an air of laughable self-importance.

"And anyhow," said Mam Tonsard, "my father had better keep out of the way. Do you really mean to find the cows?"

"Monsieur Brunet, who is a very good fellow, would much rather find nothing but their dung," answered Vermichel. "A man who is obliged to be out and about day and night had better be careful."

"If he is, he has good reason to be," said Tonsard, sententiously.

"So," continued Vermichel, "he said to Monsieur Michaud, 'I'll go as soon as the court is up.' If he had wanted to find the cows he 'd have gone at seven o'clock in the morning. But that did n't suit Michaud, and Brunet has had to be off. You can't take in Michaud, he 's a trained hound! Ha, the brigand!"

"Ought to have stayed in the army, a swaggerer like that," said Tonsard; "he is only fit to deal with enemies. I wish he would come and ask me my name. He may call himself a veteran of the young guard, but I know very well that if I measured spurs with him, I'd keep my feathers up longest."

"Look here!" said Mam Tonsard to Vermichel, "when are the notices for the ball at Soulanges coming out? Here it is the eighth of August."

"I took them yesterday to Monsieur Bournier at Ville-aux-Fayes, to be printed," replied Vermichel; "they do talk of fireworks on the lake."

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"What crowds of people we shall have!" cried Fourchon.

"Profits for Socquard!" said Tonsard, spitefully.

"If it does n't rain," said his wife, by way of comfort.

At this moment the trot of a horse coming from the direction of Soulanges was heard, and five minutes later the sheriff's officer fastened his horse to a post placed for the purpose near the wicket gate through which the cows were driven. Then he showed his head at the door of the Grand-I-Vert.

"Come, my boys, let's lose no time," he said, pretending to be in a hurry.

"Hey!" said Vermichel. "Here's a refractory, Monsieur Brunet; Père Fourchon wants to drop off."

"He has had too many drops already," said the sheriff; "but the law in this case does not require that he shall be sober."

"Please excuse me, Monsieur Brunet," said Fourchon, "I am expected at Les Aigues on business; they are in treaty for an otter."

Brunet, a withered little man dressed from head to foot in black cloth, with a bilious skin, a furtive eye, curly hair, lips tight-drawn, pinched nose, anxious expression, and gruff in speech, exhibited the phenomenon of a character and bearing in perfect harmony with his profession. He was so well-informed as to the law, or, to speak more correctly, the quibbles of the law, that he had come to be both the terror and the counsellor of the whole canton. He was not without a certain popularity among the peasantry, from whom he usually took his pay in kind. The compound of his active and negative qualities and his knowledge of how

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to manage matters got him the custom of the canton, to the exclusion of his coadjutor Plissoud, about whom we shall have something to say later. This chance combination of a sheriff's officer who does everything and a sheriff's officer who does nothing is not at all uncommon in the country justice courts.

"So matters are getting warm, are they?" said Tonsard to little Brunet.

"What can you expect? you pilfer the man too much, and he 's going to protect himself," replied the officer. "It will be a bad business for you in the end; government will interfere."

"Then we, poor unfortunates, must give up the ghost!" said Mam Tonsard, offering him a glass of brandy on a saucer.

"The unfortunate may all die, yet they 'll never be lacking in the land," said Fourchon, sententiously."

"You do great damage to the woods," retorted the sheriff.

"Now don't believe that, Monsieur Brunet," said Mam Tonsard; "they make such a fuss about a few miserable fagots!"

"We did n't crush the rich low enough during the Revolution, that 's what 's the trouble," said Tonsard.

Just then a horrible, and quite incomprehensible noise was heard. It seemed to be a rush of hurried feet, accompanied with a rattle of arms, half-drowned by the rustling of leaves, the dragging of branches, and the sound of still more hasty feet. Two voices, as different as the two footsteps, were venting noisy exclamations. Everybody inside the inn guessed at once that a man was pursuing a woman; but why? The uncertainty did not last long.

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"It is mother!" said Tonsard, jumping up; "I know her shriek."

Then suddenly, rushing up the broken steps of the Grand-I-Vert by a last effort that can be made only by the sinews of smugglers, old Mother Tonsard fell flat on the floor in the middle of the room. The immense mass of wood she carried on her head made a terrible noise as it crashed against the top of the door and then upon the ground. Every one had jumped out of the way. The table, the bottles, the chairs were knocked over and scattered. The noise was as great as if the cottage itself had come tumbling down.

"I 'm dead! The scoundrel has killed me!"

The words and the flight of the old woman were explained by the apparition on the threshold of a keeper, dressed in green livery, wearing a hat edged with silver cord, a sabre at his side, a leathern shoulder-belt bearing the arms of Montcornet charged with those of the Troisvilles, the regulation red waistcoat, and buckskin gaiters which came above the knee.

After a moment's hesitation the keeper said, looking at Brunet and Vermichel, "Here are witnesses."

"Witnesses of what?" said Tonsard.

"That woman has a ten year-old oak, cut into logs, inside those fagots; it is a regular crime!"

The moment the word "witness" was uttered Vermichel thought best to breathe the fresh air of the vineyard.

"Of what? witnesses of what?" cried Tonsard, standing in front of the keeper while his wife helped up the old woman. "Do you mean to show your claws, Vatel? Accuse persons and arrest them on the highway, brig-

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and, — that's your domain; but get out of here! A man's house is his castle."

"I caught her in the act, and your mother must come with me."

"Arrest my mother in my house? You have no right to do it. My house is inviolable, — all the world knows that, at least. Have you got a warrant from Monsieur Guerbet, the magistrate? Ha! you must have the law behind you before you come in here. You are not the law, though you have sworn an oath to starve us to death, you miserable forest-gauger, you!"

The fury of the keeper waxed so hot that he was on the point of seizing hold of the wood, when the old woman, a frightful bit of black parchment endowed with motion, the like of which can be seen only in David's picture of "The Sabines," screamed at him, "Don't touch it, or I 'll fly at your eyes!"

"Well, then, undo that pile in presence of Monsieur Brunet," said the keeper.

Though the sheriff's officer had assumed the indifference that the routine of business does really give to officials of his class, he threw a glance at Tonsard and his wife which said plainly, "A bad business!" Old Fourchon looked at his daughter, and slyly pointed at a pile of ashes in the chimney. Mam Tonsard, who understood in a moment from that significant gesture both the danger of her mother-in-law and the advice of her father, seized a handful of ashes and flung them in the keeper's eyes. Vatel roared with pain; Tonsard pushed him roughly upon the broken door-steps where the blinded man stumbled and fell, and then rolled nearly down to the gate, dropping his gun on the way. In an instant the load of sticks was unfastened, and the oak

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logs pulled out and hidden with a rapidity no words can describe. Brunet, anxious not to witness this manœuvre, which he readily foresaw, rushed after the keeper to help him up; then he placed him on the bank and wet his handkerchief in water to wash the eyes of the poor fellow, who, in spite of his agony, was trying to reach the brook.

"You are in the wrong, Vatel," said Brunet; "you have no right to enter houses, don't you see?"

The old woman, a little hump-backed creature, stood on the sill of the door, with her hands on her hips, darting flashes from her eyes and curses from her foaming lips shrill enough to be heard at Blangy.

"Ha! the villain, 't was well done! May hell get you! To suspect me of cutting trees! — *me*, the most honest woman in the village. To hunt me like vermin! I'd like to see you lose your cursed eyes, for then we'd have peace. You are birds of ill-omen, the whole of you; you invent shameful stories to stir up strife between your master and us."

The keeper allowed the sheriff to bathe his eyes and all the while the latter kept telling him that he was legally wrong.

"The old thief! she has tired us out," said Vatel at last. "She has been at work in the woods all night."

As the whole family had taken an active hand in hiding the live wood and putting things straight in the cottage, Tonsard presently appeared at the door with an insolent air. "Vatel, my man, if you ever again dare to force your way into my domicile, my gun shall answer you," he said. "To-day you have had the ashes; the next time you shall have the fire. You don't know your own business. That 's enough. Now if you feel hot

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after this affair take some wine, I offer it to you; and you may come in and see that my old mother's bundle of fagots had n't a scrap of live wood in it; it is every bit brushwood."

"Scoundrel!" said the keeper to the sheriff, in a low voice, more enraged by this speech than by the smart of his eyes.

Just then Charles, the groom, appeared at the gate of the Grand-I-Vert.

"What is the matter, Vatel?" he said.

"Ah!" said the keeper, wiping his eyes, which he had plunged wide open into the rivulet to give them a final cleansing. "I have some debtors in there that I 'll cause to rue the day they saw the light."

"If you take it that way, Monsieur Vatel," said Tonsard, coldly, "you will find we don't want for courage in Burgundy."

Vatel departed. Not feeling much curiosity to know what the trouble was, Charles went up the steps and looked into the house.

"Come to the château, you and your otter, — if you really have one," he said to Père Fourchon.

The old man rose hurriedly and followed him.

"Well, where is it, — that otter of yours?" said Charles, smiling doubtfully.

"This way," said the old fellow, going toward the Thune.

The name is that of a brook formed by the overflow of the mill-race and of certain springs in the park of Les Aigues. It runs by the side of the county road as far as the lakelet of Soulanges, which it crosses, and then falls into the Avonne, after feeding the mills and ponds on the Soulanges estate.

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"Here it is; I hid it in the brook, with a stone round its neck."

As he stooped and rose again the old man missed the coin out of his pocket, where metal was so uncommon that he was likely to notice its presence or its absence immediately.

"Ah, the sharks!" he cried. "If I hunt otters they hunt fathers-in-law! They get out of me all I earn, and tell me it is for my good! If it were not for my poor Mouche, who is the comfort of my old age, I 'd drown myself. Children! they are the ruin of their fathers. You have n't married, have you, Monsieur Charles? Then don't; never get married, and then you can't reproach yourself for spreading bad blood. I, who expected to buy my tow with that money, and there it is filched, stolen! That monsieur up at Les Aigues, a fine young fellow, gave me ten francs; ha! well! it 'll put up the price of my otter now."

Charles distrusted the old man so profoundly that he took his grievances (this time very sincere) for the preliminary of what he called, in servant's slang, "varnish," and he made the great mistake of letting his opinion appear in a satirical grin, which the spiteful old fellow detected.

"Come, come! Père Fourchon, now behave yourself; you are going to see Madame," said Charles, noticing how the rubies flashed on the nose and cheeks of the old drunkard.

"I know how to attend to business, Charles; and the proof is that if you will get me out of the kitchen the remains of the breakfast and a bottle or two of Spanish wine, I 'll tell you something which will save you from a 'foul.'"

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"Tell me, and François shall get Monsieur's own order to give you a glass of wine," said the groom.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Well then, I know you meet my granddaughter Catherine under the bridge of the Avonne. Godain is in love with her; he saw you, and he is fool enough to be jealous, — I say fool, for a peasant ought n't to have feelings which belong only to rich folks. If you go to the ball of Soulanges at Tivoli and dance with her, you 'll dance higher than you 'll like. Godain is rich and dangerous; he is capable of breaking your arm without your getting a chance to arrest him."

"That would be too dear; Catherine is a fine girl, but she is not worth all that," replied Charles. "Why should Godain be so angry? others are not."

"He loves her enough to marry her."

"If he does, he 'll beat her," said Charles.

"I don't know about that," said the old man. "She takes after her mother, against whom Tonsard never raised a finger, — he 's too afraid she 'd be off, hot foot. A woman who knows how to hold her own is mighty useful. Besides, if it came to fisticuffs with Catherine, Godain, though he 's pretty strong, would n't give the last blow."

"Well, thank you, Père Fourchon; here 's forty sous to drink my health in case I can't get you the sherry."

Père Fourchon turned his head aside as he pocketed the money lest Charles should see the expression of amusement and sarcasm which he was unable to repress.

"Catherine," he resumed, "is a proud minx; she

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likes sherry. You had better tell her to go and get it at Les Aigues."

Charles looked at Père Fourchon with naïve admiration, not suspecting the eager interest the general's enemies took in slipping one more spy into the château.

"The general ought to feel happy now," continued Fourchon; "the peasants are all quiet. What does he say? Is he satisfied with Sibilet?"

"It is only Monsieur Michaud who finds fault with Sibilet. They say he 'll get him sent away."

"Professional jealousy!" exclaimed Fourchon. "I 'll bet you would like to get rid of François and take his place."

"Hang it! he has twelve hundred francs wages," said Charles; "but they can't send him off, — he knows the general's secrets."

"Just as Madame Michaud knows the countess's," remarked Fourchon, watching the other carefully. "Look here, my boy, do you know whether Monsieur and Madame have separate rooms?"

"Of course; if they did n't, Monsieur would n't be so fond of Madame."

"Is that all you know?" said Fourchon.

As they were now before the kitchen windows nothing more was said.



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## V.

### ENEMIES FACE TO FACE.

WHILE breakfast was in progress at the château, François, the head footman, whispered to Blondet, but loud enough for the general to overhear him, —

"Monsieur, Père Fourchon's boy is here; he says they have caught the otter, and wants to know if you would like it, or whether they shall take it to the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes."

Émile Blondet, though himself a past-master of hoaxing, could not keep his cheeks from blushing like those of a virgin who hears an indecorous story of which she knows the meaning.

"Ha! ha! so you have hunted the otter this morning with Père Fourchon?" cried the general, with a roar of laughter.

"What is it?" asked the countess, uneasy at her husband's laugh.

"When a man of his wit and intelligence is taken in by old Fourchon," continued the general, "a retired cuirassier need not blush for having hunted that otter; which bears an enormous resemblance to the third post-horse we are made to pay for and never see." With that he went off into further explosions of laughter, in the midst of which he contrived to say: "I am not surprised you had to change your boots — and your trousers; I have no doubt you have been wading!

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The joke didn't go so far as that with me, — I stayed on the bank; but then, you know, you are so much more intelligent than I — "

"But you forget," interrupted Madame de Montcornet, "that I do not know what you are talking of."

At these words, said with some pique, the general grew serious, and Blondet told the story of his fishing for the otter.

"But if they really have an otter," said the countess, "those poor people are not to blame."

"Oh, but it is ten years since an otter has been seen about here," said the pitiless general.

"Monsieur le comte," said François, "the boy swears by all that's sacred that he has got one."

"If they have one I 'll buy it," said the general.

"I don't suppose," remarked the Abbé Brossette, "that God has condemned Les Aigues to never have otters."

"Ah! Monsieur le curé!" cried Blondet, "if you bring the Almighty against me — "

"But what is all this? Who is here?" said the countess, hastily.

"Mouche, madame, — the boy who goes about with old Fourchon," said the footman.

"Bring him in — that is, if Madame will allow it?" said the general; "he may amuse you."

Mouche presently appeared, in his usual state of comparative nudity. Beholding this personification of poverty in the middle of this luxurious dining-room, the cost of one panel of which would have been a fortune to the bare-legged, bare-breasted, and bare-headed child, it was impossible not to be moved by an impulse of

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charity. The boy's eyes, like blazing coals, gazed first at the luxuries of the room, and then at those on the table.

"Have you no mother?" asked Madame de Montcornet, unable otherwise to explain the child's nakedness.

"No ma'am; m'ma died of grief for losing p'pa, who went to the army in 1812 without marrying her with papers, and got frozen, saving your presence. But I've my Grandpa Fourchon, who is a good man, — though he does beat me bad sometimes."

"How is it, my dear, that such wretched people can be found on your estate?" said the countess, looking at the general.

"Madame la comtesse," said the abbé, "in this district we have none but voluntary paupers. Monsieur le comte does all he can; but we have to do with a class of persons who are without religion and who have but one idea, that of living at your expense."

"But, my dear abbé," said Blondet, "you are here to improve their morals."

"Monsieur," replied the abbé, "my bishop sent me here as if on a mission to savages; but, as I had the honor of telling him, the savages of France cannot be reached. They make it a law unto themselves not to listen to us; whereas the church does get some hold on the savages of America."

"M'sieur le curé, they do help me a bit now," remarked Mouche; "but if I went to your church they *would n't*, and the other folks would make game of my breeches."

"Religion ought to begin by giving him trousers, my dear abbé," said Blondet. "In your foreign missions don't you begin by coaxing the savages?"

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"He would soon sell them," answered the abbé, in a low tone; "besides, my salary does not enable me to begin on that line."

"Monsieur le curé is right," said the general, looking at Mouche.

The policy of the little scamp was to appear not to hear what they were saying when it was against himself.

"The boy is intelligent enough to know good from evil," continued the count, "and he is old enough to work; yet he thinks of nothing but how to commit evil without being found out. All the keepers know him. He is very well aware that the master of an estate may witness a trespass on his property and yet have no right to arrest the trespasser. I have known him keep his cows boldly in my meadows, though he knew I saw him; but now, ever since I have been mayor, he runs away fast enough."

"Oh, that is very wrong," said the countess; "you should not take other people's things, my little man."

"Madame, we must eat. My grandpa gives me more slaps than food, and they don't fill my stomach, slaps don't. When the cows come in I milk 'em just a little and I live on that. Monseigneur is n't so poor but what he 'll let me drink a drop o' milk the cows get from his grass?"

"Perhaps he has n't eaten anything to-day," said the countess, touched by his misery. "Give him some bread and the rest of that chicken; let him have his breakfast," she added, looking at the footman. "Where do you sleep, my child?"

"Anywhere, madame; under the stars in summer, and wherever they 'll let us in winter."

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"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"There is still time to bring him up to better ways," said the countess to her husband.

"He will make a good soldier," said the general, gruffly; "he is well toughened. I went through that kind of thing myself, and here I am."

"Excuse me, general, I don't belong to nobody," said the boy, "I can't be drafted. My poor mother was n't married, and I was born in a field. I'm a son of the *airth*, as grandpa says. M'ma saved me from the army, that she did! My name ain't no more Mouche than nothing at all. Grandpa keeps telling me all my advantages. I'm not on the register, and when I'm old enough to be drafted I can go all over France and they can't take me."

"Are you fond of your grandfather?" said the countess, trying to look into the child's heart.

"My! does n't he box my ears when he feels like it! but then, after all, he's such fun; he's such good company! He says he pays himself that way for having taught me to read and write."

"Can you read?" asked the count.

"Yah, I should think so, Monsieur le comte, and fine writing too — just as true as we've got that otter."

"Read that," said the count, giving him a newspaper."

"The Qu-o-ti-dienne," read Mouche, hesitating only three times.

Every one, even the abbé, laughed.

"Why do you make me read that newspaper?" cried Mouche, angrily. "My grandpa says it is made

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up to please the rich, and everybody knows later just what 's in it."

"The child is right, general," said Blondet; "and he makes me long to see my hoaxing friend again."

Mouche understood perfectly that he was posing for the amusement of the company; the pupil of Père Fourchon was worthy of his master, and he forthwith began to cry.

"How can you tease a child with bare feet?" said the countess.

"And who thinks it quite natural that his grandfather should recoup himself for his education by boxing his ears," said Blondet.

"Tell me, my poor little fellow, have you really caught an otter."

"Yes, madame; as true as that you are the prettiest lady I have seen, or ever shall see," said the child, wiping his eyes.

"Then show me the otter," said the general.

"Oh M'sieur le comte, my grandpa has hidden it; but it was kicking still when we were at work at the rope-walk. Send for my grandpa, please; he wants to sell it to you himself."

"Take him into the kitchen," said the countess to François, "and give him his breakfast, and send Charles to fetch Père Fourchon. Find some shoes, and a pair of trousers and a waistcoat for the poor child; those who come here naked must go away clothed."

"May God bless you, my beautiful lady," said Mouche, departing. "M'sieur le curé may feel quite sure that I 'll keep the things and wear 'em fête-days, because you give 'em to me."

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Émile and Madame Montcornet looked at each other with some surprise, and seemed to say to the abbé, "The boy is not a fool!"

"It is quite true, madame," said the abbé after the child had gone, "that we cannot reckon with Poverty. I believe it has hidden excuses of which God alone can judge, — physical excuses, often congenital; moral excuses, born in the character, produced by an order of things that are often the result of qualities which, unhappily for society, have no vent. Deeds of heroism performed upon the battle-field ought to teach us that the worst scoundrels may become heroes. But here in this place you are living under exceptional circumstances; and if your benevolence is not controlled by reflection and judgment you run the risk of supporting your enemies."

"Our enemies?" exclaimed the countess.

"Cruel enemies," said the general, gravely.

"Père Fourchon and his son-in-law Tonsard," said the abbé, "are the strength and the intelligence of the lower classes of this valley, who consult them on all occasions. The Machiavelism of these people is beyond belief. Ten peasants meeting in a tavern are the small change of great political questions."

Just then François announced Monsieur Sibilet.

"He is my minister of finance," said the general, smiling; "ask him in. He will explain to you the gravity of the situation," he added, looking at his wife and Blondet.

"Because he has reasons of his own for not concealing it," said the curé, in a low tone.

Blondet then beheld a personage of whom he had heard much ever since his arrival, and whom he desired

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to know, the land-steward of Les Aigues. He saw a man of medium height, about thirty years of age, with a sulky look and a discontented face, on which a smile sat ill. Beneath an anxious brow a pair of greenish eyes evaded the eyes of others, and so disguised their thought. Sibilet was dressed in a brown surtout coat, black trousers and waistcoat, and wore his hair long and flat to the head, which gave him a clerical look. His trousers barely concealed that he was knock-kneed. Though his pallid complexion and flabby flesh gave the impression of an unhealthy constitution, Sibilet was really robust. The tones of his voice, which were a little thick, harmonized with this unflattering exterior.

Blondet gave a hasty look at the abbé, and the glance with which the young priest answered it showed the journalist that his own suspicions about the steward were certainties to the curate.

"Did not you tell me, my dear Sibilet," said the general, "that you estimate the value of what the peasants steal from us at a quarter of the whole revenue?"

"Much more than that, Monsieur le comte," replied the steward. "The poor about here get more from your property than the State exacts in taxes. A little scamp like Mouche can glean his two bushels a day. Old women, whom you would really think at their last gasp, become at the harvest and vintage times as active and healthy as girls. You can witness that phenomenon very soon," said Sibilet, addressing Blondet, "for the harvest, which was put back by the rains in July will begin next week, when they cut the rye. The gleaners must have a certificate of pauperism from the mayor of the district, and no district should allow any one to glean except the paupers; but the districts of

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one canton do glean in those of another without certificate. If we have sixty real paupers in our district, there are at least forty others who could support themselves if they were not so idle. Even persons who have a business leave it to glean in the fields and in the vineyards. All these people, taken together, gather in this neighborhood something like three hundred bushels a day; the harvest lasts two weeks, and that makes four thousand five hundred bushels in this district alone. The gleaning takes more from an estate than the taxes. As to the abuse of pasturage, it robs us of fully one-sixth of the produce of the meadows; and as to that of the woods, it is incalculable, — they have actually come to cutting down six-year-old trees. The loss to you, Monsieur le comte, amounts to fully twenty-odd thousand francs a year."

"Do you hear that, madame?" said the general to his wife.

"Is it not exaggerated?" asked Madame de Montcornet.

"No, madame, unfortunately not," said the abbé. "Poor Niseron, that old fellow with the white head, who combines the functions of bell-ringer, beadle, gravedigger, sexton, and clerk, in defiance of his republican opinions, — I mean the grandfather of the little Geneviève whom you placed with Madame Michaud — "

"La Péchina," said Sibilet, interrupting the abbé.

"Péchina!" said the countess, "whom do you mean?"

"Madame la comtesse, when you met little Geneviève on the road in a miserable condition, you cried out in Italian, 'Piccina!' The word became a nickname, and is now corrupted all through the district into

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Péchina," said the abbé. "The poor girl comes to church with Madame Michaud and Madame Sibilet."

"And she is none the better for it," said Sibilet "for the others ill-treat her on account of her religion."

"Well, that poor old man of seventy gleans, honestly, about a bushel and a half a day," continued the priest; "but his natural uprightness prevents him from selling his gleanings as others do, — he keeps them for his own consumption. Monsieur Langlumé, your miller, grinds his flour gratis at my request, and my servant bakes his bread with mine."

"I had quite forgotten my little protégée," said the countess, troubled at Sibilet's remark. "Your arrival," she added to Blondet, "has quite turned my head. But after breakfast I will take you to the gate of the Avonne and show you the living image of those women whom the painters of the fifteenth century delighted to perpetuate."

The sound of Père Fourchon's broken sabots was now heard; after depositing them in the antechamber, he was brought to the door of the dining-room by François. At a sign from the countess, François allowed him to pass in, followed by Mouche with his mouth full and carrying the otter, hanging by a string tied to its yellow paws, webbed like those of a palmiped. He cast upon his four superiors sitting at table, and also upon Sibilet, that look of mingled distrust and servility which serves as a veil to the thoughts of the peasantry; then he brandished his amphibian with a triumphant air.

"Here it is!" he cried, addressing Blondet.

"My otter!" returned the Parisian, "and well paid for."

"Oh, my dear gentleman," replied Père Fourchon,

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"yours got away; she is now in her burrow, and she won't come out, for she 's a female, — this is a male; Mouche saw him coming just as you went away. As true as you live, as true as that Monsieur le comte covered himself and his cuirassiers with glory at Waterloo, the otter is mine, just as much as Les Aigues belongs to Monseigneur the general. But the otter is *yours* for twenty francs; if not I'll take it to the sub-prefect. If Monsieur Gourdon thinks it too dear, then I'll give you the preference; that 's only fair, as we hunted together this morning."

"Twenty francs!" said Blondet. "In good French you can't call that *giving* the preference."

"Hey, my dear gentlemen," cried the old fellow. "Perhaps I don't know French, and I'll ask it in good Burgundian; as long as I get the money, I don't care, I'll talk Latin: *latinus*, *latina*, *latinum!* Besides, twenty francs is what you promised me this morning. My children have already stolen the silver you gave me; I wept about it, coming along, — ask Charles if I did n't. Not that I'd arrest 'em for the value of ten francs and have 'em up before the judge, no! But just as soon as I earn a few pennies, they make me drink and get 'em out of me. Ah! it is hard, hard to be reduced to go and get my wine elsewhere. But just see what children are in these days! That 's what we got by the Revolution; it is all for the children now-a-days, and parents are suppressed. I'm bringing up Mouche on another tack; he loves me, the little scamp," — giving his grandson a poke.

"It seems to me you are making him a little thief, like all the rest," said Sibilet; "he never lies down at night without some sin on his conscience."

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"Ha! Monsieur Sibilet, his conscience is as clean as yours any day! Poor child! what can he steal? A little grass! that's better than throttling a man! He don't know mathematics like you, nor subtraction, nor addition, nor multiplication, — you are very unjust to us, that you are! You call us a nest of brigands, but you are the cause of the misunderstandings between our good landlord here, who is a worthy man, and the rest of us, who are all worthy men, — there ain't an honester part of the country than this. Come, what do you mean? do I own property? don't I go half-naked, and Mouche too? Fine sheets we sleep in, washed by the dew every morning! and unless you want the air we breathe and the sunshine we drink, I should like to know what we have that you can take away from us! The rich folks rob as they sit in their chimney-corners, — and more profitably, too, than by picking up a few sticks in the woods. I don't see no game-keepers or patrols after Monsieur Gaubertin, who came here as naked as a worm and is now worth his millions. It's easy said, 'Robbers!' Here's fifteen years that old Guerbet, the tax-gatherer at Soulanges, carries his money along the roads by the dead of night, and nobody ever took a farthing from him; is that like a land of robbers? Has robbery made us rich? Show me which of us two, your class or mine, live the idlest lives and have the most to live on without earning it."

"If you were to work," said the abbé, "you would have property. God blesses labor."

"I don't want to contradict you, M'sieur l'abbé, for you are wiser than I, and perhaps you'll know how to explain something that puzzles me. Now see, here I am, ain't I? — that drunken, lazy, idle, good-for-nothing

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old Fourchon, who had an education and was a farmer, and got down in the mud and never got up again, — well, what difference is there between me and that honest and worthy old Niseron, seventy years old (and that's my age) who has dug the soil for sixty years and got up every day before it was light to go to his work, and has made himself an iron body and a fine soul? Well, is n't he as bad off as I am? His little granddaughter, Péchina, is at service with Madame Michaud, whereas my little Mouche is as free as air. So that poor good man gets rewarded for his virtues in exactly the same way that I get punished for my vices. He don't know what a glass of good wine is, he 's as sober as an apostle, he buries the dead, and I — I play for the living to dance. He is always in a peck o' troubles, while I slip along in a devil-may-care way. We have come along about even in life; we 've got the same snow on our heads, the same funds in our pockets, and I supply him with rope to ring his bell. He 's a republican and I 'm not even a publican, — that 's all the difference as far as I can see. A peasant may do good or do evil (according to your ideas) and he 'll go out of the world just as he came into it, in rags; while you wear the fine clothes."

No one interrupted Père Fourchon, who seemed to owe his eloquence to his potations. At first Sibilet tried to cut him short, but desisted at a sign from Blondet. The abbé, the general, and the countess, all understood from the expression of the writer's eye that he wanted to study the question of pauperism from life, and perhaps take his revenge on Père Fourchon.

"What sort of education are you giving Mouche?"

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asked Blondet. "Do you expect to make him any better than your daughters?"

"Does he ever speak to him of God?" said the priest.

"Oh, no, no! Monsieur le curé, I don't tell him to fear God, but men. God is good; he has promised us poor folks, so you say, the kingdom of heaven, because the rich people keep the earth to themselves. I tell him: 'Mouche! fear the prison, and keep out of it, — for that's the way to the scaffold. Don't steal anything, make people give it to you. Theft leads to murder, and murder brings down the justice of men. The razor of justice, — *that's* what you've got to fear; it lets the rich sleep easy and keeps the poor awake. Learn to read. Education will teach you ways to grab money under cover of the law, like that fine Monsieur Gaubertin; why, you can even be a land-steward like Monsieur Sibilet here, who gets his rations out of Monsieur le comte. The thing to do is to keep well with the rich, and pick up the crumbs that fall from their tables.' That's what I call giving him a good, solid education; and you'll always find the little rascal on the side of the law, — he'll be a good citizen and take care of me."

"What do you mean to make of him?" asked Blondet.

"A servant, to begin with," returned Fourchon, "because then he'll see his masters close by, and learn something; he'll complete his education, I'll warrant you. Good example will be a fortune to him, with the law on his side like the rest of you. If M'sieur le comte would only take him in his stables and let him learn to groom the horses, the boy will be mighty

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pleased, for though I've taught him to fear men, he don't fear animals."

"You are a clever fellow, Père Fourchon," said Blondet; "you know what you are talking about, and there's sense in what you say."

"Oh, sense? no; I left my sense at the Grand-I-Vert when I lost those silver pieces."

"How is it that a man of your capacity should have dropped so low? As things are now, a peasant can only blame himself for his poverty; he is a free man, and he can become a rich one. It is not as it used to be. If a peasant lays by his money, he can always buy a bit of land and become his own master."

"I've seen the olden time and I've seen the new, my dear wise gentleman," said Fourchon; "the sign over the door has been changed, that's true, but the wine is the same, — to-day is the younger brother of yesterday, that's all. Put that in your newspaper! Are we poor folks free? We still belong to the same parish, and its lord is always there, — I call him Toil. The hoe, our sole property, has never left our hands. Let it be the old lords or the present taxes which take the best of our earnings, the fact remains that we sweat our lives out in toil."

"But you could undertake a business, and try to make your fortune," said Blondet.

"Try to make my fortune! And where shall I try? If I wish to leave my own province, I must get a passport, and that costs forty sous. Here's forty years that I've never had a slut of a forty-sous piece jingling against another in my pocket. If you want to travel you need as many crowns as there are villages, and there are mighty few Fourchons who have enough to

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get to six of 'em. It is only the draft that gives us a chance to get away. And what good does the army do us? The colonels live by the soldier, just as the rich folks live by the peasant; and out of every hundred of 'em you won't find more than one of our breed. It is just as it is the world over, one rolling in riches, for a hundred down in the mud. Why are we in the mud? Ask God and the usurers. The best we can do is to stay in our own parts, where we are penned like sheep by the force of circumstances, as our fathers were by the rule of the lords. As for me, what do I care what shackles they are that keep me here? let it be the law of public necessity or the tyranny of the old lords, it is all the same; we are condemned to dig the soil forever. There, where we are born, there we dig it, that earth! and spade it, and manure it, and delve in it, for you who are born rich just as we are born poor. The masses will always be what they are, and stay what they are. The number of us who manage to rise is nothing like the number of you who topple down! We know that well enough, if we have no education! You must n't be after us with your sheriff all the time, — not if you 're wise. We let you alone, and you must let us alone. If not, and things get worse, you 'll have to feed us in your prisons, where we 'd be much better off than in our homes. You want to remain our masters, and we shall always be enemies, as much as we were thirty years ago. You have everything, we have nothing; you can't expect we should ever be friends."

"That 's what I call a declaration of war," said the general.

"Monseigneur," retorted Fourchon, "when Les Aigues belonged to that poor Madame (God keep her



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soul and forgive her the sins of her youth!) we were happy. *She* let us get our food from the fields and our fuel from the forest; and was she any the poorer for it? And you, who are at least as rich as she, you hunt us like wild beasts, neither more nor less, and drag the poor before the courts. Well, evil will come of it! you'll be the cause of some great calamity. Have n't I just seen your keeper, that shuffling Vatel, half kill a poor old woman for a stick of wood? It is such fellows as that who make you an enemy to the poor; and the talk is very bitter against you. They curse you every bit as hard as they used to bless the late Madame. The curse of the poor, monseigneur, is a seed that grows, — grows taller than your tall oaks, and oak-wood builds the scaffold. Nobody here tells you the truth; and here it is, yes, the truth! I expect to die before long, and I risk very little in telling it to you, the *truth!* I, who play for the peasants to dance at the great fêtes at Soulanges, I head what the people say. Well, they're all against you; and they'll make it impossible for you to stay here. If that damned Michaud of yours does n't change, they'll force you to change him. There! that information *and* the otter are worth twenty francs, and more too."

As the old fellow uttered the last words a man's step was heard, and the individual just threatened by Fourchon entered unannounced. It was easy to see from the glance he threw at the old man that the threat had reached his ears, and all Fourchon's insolence sank in a moment. The look produced precisely the same effect upon him that the eye of a policeman produces on a thief. Fourchon knew he was wrong, and that Michaud might very well accuse him of saying

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these things merely to terrify the inhabitants of Les Aigues.

"This is the minister of war," said the general to Blondet, nodding at Michaud.

"Pardon me, madame, for having entered without asking if you were willing to receive me," said the newcomer to the countess; "but I have urgent reasons for speaking to the general at once."

Michaud, as he said this, took notice of Sibilet, whose expression of keen delight in Fourchon's daring words was not seen by the four persons seated at the table, because they were so preoccupied by the old man; whereas Michaud, who for secret reasons watched Sibilet constantly, was struck with his air and manner.

"He has earned his twenty francs, Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet; "the otter is fully worth it."

"Give him twenty francs," said the general to the footman.

"Do you mean to take my otter away from me?" said Blondet to the general.

"I shall have it stuffed," replied the latter.

"Ah! but that good gentleman said I might keep the skin," cried Fourchon.

"Well, then," exclaimed the countess, hastily, "you shall have five francs more for the skin; but go away now."

The powerful odor emitted by the pair made the dining-room so horribly offensive that Madame de Montcornet, whose senses were very delicate, would have been forced to leave the room if Fourchon and Mouche had remained. To this circumstance the old man was indebted for his twenty-five francs. He left the room

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with a timid glance at Michaud, making him an interminable series of bows.

"What I was saying to monseigneur, Monsieur Michaud," he added, "was really for your good."

"Or for that of those who pay you," replied Michaud, with a searching look.

"When you have served the coffee, leave the room," said the general to the servants, "and see that the doors are shut."

Blondet, who had not yet seen the bailiff of Les Aigues, was conscious, as he now saw him, of a totally different impression from that conveyed by Sibilet. Just as the steward inspired distrust and repulsion, so Michaud commanded respect and confidence. The first attraction of his presence was a happy face, of a fine oval, pure in outline, in which the nose bore part, — a regularity which is lacking in the majority of French faces. Though the features were correct in drawing, they were not without expression, due, perhaps, to the harmonious coloring of the warm brown and ochre tints, indicative of physical health and strength. The clear brown eyes, which were bright and piercing, kept no reserves in the expression of his thought; they looked straight into the eyes of others. The broad white forehead was thrown still further into relief by his abundant black hair. Honesty, decision, and a saintly serenity were the animating points of this noble face, where a few deep lines upon the brow were the result of the man's military career. Doubt and suspicion could there be read the moment they had entered his mind. His figure, like that of all men selected for the *élite* of the cavalry service, though shapely and elegant, was vigorously

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built. Michaud, who wore moustachios, whiskers, and a chin beard, recalled that martial type of face which a deluge of patriotic paintings and engravings came very near making ridiculous. This type had the defect of being common in the French army; perhaps the continuance of the same emotions, the same camp sufferings from which none were exempt, neither high nor low, and more especially the same efforts of officers and men upon the battle-fields, may have contributed to produce this uniformity of countenance. Michaud, who was dressed in dark blue cloth, still wore the black satin stock and high boots of a soldier, which increased the slight stiffness and rigidity of his bearing. The shoulders sloped, the chest expanded, as though the man were still under arms. The red ribbon of the Legion of honor was in his buttonhole. In short, to give a last touch in one word about the moral qualities beneath this purely physical presentment, it may be said that while the steward, from the time he first entered upon his functions, never failed to call his master "Monsieur le comte," Michaud never addressed him otherwise than as "General."

Blondet exchanged another look with the Abbé Brossette, which meant, "What a contrast!" as he signed to him to observe the two men. Then, as if to know whether the character and mind and speech of the bailiff harmonized with his form and countenance, he turned to Michaud and said: —

"I was out early this morning, and found your underkeepers still sleeping."

"At what hour?" said late soldier, anxiously.

"Half-past seven."

Michaud gave a half-roguish glance at the general.

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"By what gate did monsieur leave the park?" he asked.

"By the gate of Conches. The keeper, in his night-shirt, looked at me through the window," replied Blondet.

"Gaillard had probably just gone to bed," answered Michaud. "You said you were out early, and I thought you meant day-break. If my man were at home at that time, he must have been ill; but at half-past seven he was sure to be in bed. We are up all night," added Michaud, after a slight pause, replying to a surprised look on the countess's face, "but our watchfulness is often wasted. You have just given twenty-five francs to a man who, not an hour ago, was quietly helping to hide the traces of a robbery committed upon you this very morning. I came to speak to you about it, general, when you have finished breakfast; for something will have to be done."

"You are always for maintaining the right, my dear Michaud, and *summum jus*, *summum injuria*. If you are not more tolerant, you will get into trouble, so Sibilet here tells me. I wish you could have heard Père Fourchon just now; the wine he had been drinking made him speak out."

"He frightened me," said the countess.

"He said nothing I did not know long ago," replied the general.

"Oh! the rascal was n't drunk; he was playing a part; for whose benefit I leave you to guess. Perhaps you know?" returned Michaud, fixing an eye on Sibilet which caused the latter to turn red.

"*O rus!*" cried Blondet, with another look at the abbé.

"But these poor creatures suffer," said the countess,

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"and there is a great deal of truth in what old Fourchon has just screamed at us, — for I cannot call it speaking."

"Madame," replied Michaud, "do you suppose that for fourteen years the soldiers of the Emperor slept on a bed of roses? My general is a count, he is a grand officer of the Legion of honor, he has had perquisites and endowments given to him; am I jealous of him, I who fought as he did? Do I wish to cheat him of his glory, to steal his perquisites, to deny him the honor due to his rank? The peasant should obey as the soldier obeys; he should feel the loyalty of a soldier, his respect for acquired rights, and strive to become an officer himself, honorably, by labor and not by theft. The sabre and the plough are twins; though the soldier has something more than the peasant, — he has death hanging over him at any minute."

"I want to say that from the pulpit," cried the abbé.

"Tolerant!" continued the keeper, replying to the general's remark about Sibilet, "I would tolerate a loss of ten per cent upon the gross returns of Les Aigues; but as things are now thirty per cent is what you lose, general; and, if Monsieur Sibilet's accounts show it, I don't understand his tolerance, for he benevolently gives up a thousand or twelve hundred francs a year."

"My dear Monsieur Michaud," replied Sibilet, in a snappish tone, "I have told Monsieur le comte that I would rather lose twelve hundred francs a year than my life. Think of it seriously; I have warned you often enough."

"Life!" exclaimed the countess; "you can't mean that anybody's life is in danger?"

"Don't let us argue about state affairs here," said the general, laughing. "All this, my dear, merely

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means that Sibilet, in his capacity of financier, is timid and cowardly, while the minister of war is brave and, like his general, fears nothing."

"Call me prudent, Monsieur le comte," interposed Sibilet.

"Well, well!" cried Blondet, laughing, "so here we are, like Cooper's heroes in the forests of America, in the midst of sieges and savages."

"Come, gentlemen, it is your business to govern without letting me hear the wheels of the administration," said Madame de Montcornet.

"Ah! madame," said the curé, "but it may be right that you should know the toil from which those pretty caps you wear are derived.

"Well, then, I can go without them," replied the countess, laughing, "I will be very respectful to a twenty-franc piece, and grow as miserly as the country people themselves. Come, my dear abbé, give me your arm. Leave the general with his two ministers, and let us go to the gate of the Avonne to see Madame Michaud, for I have not had time since my arrival to pay her a visit, and I want to inquire about my little protégée."

And the pretty woman, already forgetting the rags and tatters of Mouche and Fourchon, and their eyes full of hatred, and Sibilet's warnings, went to have herself made ready for the walk.

The abbé and Blondet obeyed the behest of the mistress of the house and followed her from the dining-room, waiting till she was ready on the terrace before the château.

"What do you think of all this?" said Blondet to the abbé.

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*"'We can't desert God's cause any more than that of an emperor,' replied the priest."*

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"I am a pariah; they dog me as they would a common enemy. I am forced to keep my eyes and ears perpetually open to escape the traps they are constantly laying to get me out of the place," replied the abbé. "I am even doubtful, between ourselves, as to whether they will not shoot me."

"Why do you stay?" said Blondet.

"We can't desert God's cause any more than that of an emperor," replied the priest, with a simplicity that affected Blondet. He took the abbé's hand and shook it cordially.

"You see how it is, therefore, that I know very little of the plots that are going on," continued the abbé. "Still, I know enough to feel sure that the general is under what in Artois and in Belgium is called an 'evil grudge.'"

A few words are here necessary about the curate of Blangy.

This priest, the fourth son of a worthy middle-class family of Autun, was an intelligent man carrying his head high in his collar. Small and slight, he redeemed his rather puny appearance by the precise and carefully dressed air that belongs to Burgundians. He accepted the second-rate post of Blangy out of pure devotion, for his religious convictions were joined to political opinions that were equally strong. There was something of the priest of the olden time about him; he held to the Church and to the clergy passionately; saw the bearings of things, and no selfishness marred his one ambition, which was *to serve.* That was his motto, — to serve the Church and the monarchy wherever it was most threatened; to serve in the lowest rank like a soldier who feels that he is destined, sooner or later, to

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attain command through courage and the resolve to do his duty. He made no compromises with his vows of chastity, and poverty, and obedience; he fulfilled them, as he did the other duties of his position, with that simplicity and cheerful good-humor which are the sure indications of an honest heart, constrained to do right by natural impulses as much as by the power and consistency of religious convictions.

The priest had seen at first sight Blondet's attachment to the countess; he saw that between a Troisville and a monarchical journalist he could safely show himself to be a man of broad intelligence, because his calling was certain to be respected. He usually came to the château every evening to make the fourth at a game of whist. The journalist, able to recognize the abbé's real merits, showed him so much deference that the pair grew into sympathy with each other; as usually happens when men of intelligence meet their equals, or, if you prefer it, the ears that are able to hear them. Swords are fond of their scabbards.

"But to what do you attribute this state of things, Monsieur l'abbé, you who are able, through your disinterestedness, to look over the heads of things?"

"I shall not talk platitudes after such a flattering speech as that," said the abbé, smiling. "What is going on in this valley is spreading more or less throughout France; it is the outcome of the hopes which the upheaval of 1789 caused to infiltrate, if I may use that expression, the minds of the peasantry, the sons of the soil. The Revolution affected certain localities more than others. This side of Burgundy, nearest to Paris, is one of those places where the revolutionary ideas spread like the overrunning of the Franks by the

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Gauls. Historically, the peasants are still on the morrow of the Jacquerie; that defeat is burnt in upon their brain. They have long forgotten the facts which have now passed into the condition of an instinctive idea. That idea is bred in the peasant blood, just as the idea of superiority was once bred in noble blood. The revolution of 1789 was the retaliation of the vanquished. The peasants then set foot in possession of the soil which the feudal law had denied them for over twelve hundred years. Hence their desire for land, which they now cut up among themselves until actually they divide a furrow in two parts; which, by the bye, often hinders or prevents the collection of taxes, for the value of such fractions of property is not sufficient to pay the legal costs of recovering them."

"Very true, for the obstinacy of the small owners — their aggressiveness, if you choose — on this point is so great that in at least one thousand cantons of the three thousand of French territory, it is impossible for a rich man to buy an inch of land from a peasant," said Blondet, interrupting the abbé. "The peasants who are willing to divide up their scraps of land among themselves would not sell a fraction on any condition or at any price to the middle classes. The more money the rich man offers, the more the vague uneasiness of the peasant increases. Legal dispossession alone is able to bring the landed property of the peasant into the market. Many persons have noticed this fact without being able to find a reason for it."

"This is the reason," said the abbé, rightly believing that a pause with Blondet was equivalent to a question: "twelve centuries have done nothing for a caste whom the historic spectacle of civilization has never

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yet diverted from its one predominating thought, — a caste which still wears proudly the broad-brimmed hat of its masters, ever since an abandoned fashion placed it upon their heads. That all-pervading thought, the roots of which are in the bowels of the people, and which attached them so vehemently to Napoleon (who was personally less to them than he thought he was) and which explains the miracle of his return in 1815,— that desire for land is the sole motive power of the peasant's being. In the eyes of the masses Napoleon, ever one with them through his million of soldiers, is still the king born of the Revolution; the man who gave them possession of the soil and sold to them the national domains. His anointing was saturated with that idea."

"An idea to which 1814 dealt a blow, an idea which monarchy should hold sacred," said Blondet, quickly; "for the people may some day find on the steps of the throne a prince whose father bequeathed to him the head of Louis XVI. as an heirloom."

"Here is madame; don't say any more," said the abbé, in a low voice. "Fourchon has frightened her; and it is very desirable to keep her here in the interests of religion and of the throne, and, indeed, in those of the people themselves."

Michaud, the bailiff of Les Aigues, had come to the château in consequence of the assault on Vatel's eyes. But before we relate the consultation which then and there took place, the chain of events requires a succinct account of the circumstances under which the general purchased Les Aigues, the serious causes which led to the appointment of Sibilet as steward of that magnificent property, and the reasons why Michaud

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was made bailiff, with all the other antecedents to which were due the tension of the minds of all, and the fears expressed by Sibilet.

This rapid summary will have the merit of introducing some of the principal actors in this drama, and of exhibiting their individual interests; we shall thus be enabled to show the dangers which surrounded the General comte de Montcornet at the moment when this history opens.

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## VI.

### A TALE OF THIEVES.

When Mademoiselle Laguerre first visited her estate, in 1791, she took as steward the son of the ex-bailiff of Soulanges, named Gaubertin. The little town of Soulanges, at present nothing more than the chief town of a canton, was once the capital of a considerable county, in the days when the House of Burgundy made war upon France. Ville-aux-Fayes, now the seat of the sub-prefecture, then a mere fief, was a dependency of Soulanges, like Les Aigues, Ronquerolles, Cerneux, Conches, and a score of other parishes. The Soulanges have remained counts, whereas the Ronquerolles are now marquises by the will of that power, called the Court, which made the son of Captain du Plessis duke over the heads of the first families of the Conquest. All of which serves to prove that towns, like families, are variable in their destiny.

Gaubertin, a young man without property of any kind, succeeded a steward enriched by a management of thirty years, who preferred to become a partner in the famous firm of Minoret rather than continue to administer Les Aigues. In his own interests he introduced into his place as land-steward François Gaubertin, his accountant for five years, whom he now relied on to cover his retreat, and who, out of gratitude for his instructions, promised to obtain for him a release in full of all claims from Mademoiselle Laguerre, who

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by this time was terrified at the Revolution. Gaubertin's father, the attorney-general of the department, henceforth protected the timid woman. This provincial Fouquier-Tinville raised a false alarm of danger in the mind of the opera-divinity on the ground of her former relations to the aristocracy, so as to give his son the equally false credit of saving her life; on the strength of which Gaubertin the younger obtained very easily the release of his predecessor. Mademoiselle Laguerre then made François Gaubertin her prime minister, as much through policy as from gratitude. The late steward had not spoiled her. He sent her, every year, about thirty thousand francs, though Les Aigues brought in at that time at least forty thousand. The unsuspecting opera-singer was therefore much delighted when the new steward Gaubertin promised her thirty-six thousand.

To explain the present fortune of the land-steward of Les Aigues before the judgment-seat of probability, it is necessary to state its beginnings. Pushed by his father's influence, he became mayor of Blangy. Thus he was able, contrary to law, to make the debtors pay in coin, by "terrorizing" (a phrase of the day) such of them as might, in his opinion, be subjected to the crushing demands of the Republic. He himself paid the citizens in assignats so long as the system of paper money lasted, — a system which, if it did not make the nation prosperous, at least made the fortunes of private individuals. From 1793 to 1795, that is, for three years, François Gaubertin wrung one hundred and fifty thousand francs out of Les Aigues, with which he speculated on the stock-market in Paris. With her purse full of assignats Mademoiselle was actually

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obliged to obtain ready money from her diamonds, now useless to her. She gave them to Gaubertin, who sold them, and faithfully returned her their full price. This proof of honesty touched her heart; henceforth she believed in Gaubertin as she did in Piecini.

In 1796, at the time of his marriage with the citoyenne Isaure Mouchon, daughter of an old "conventional," a friend of his father, Gaubertin possessed about three hundred and fifty thousand francs in money. As the Directory seemed to him likely to last, he determined, before marrying, to have the accounts of his five years' stewardship ratified by Mademoiselle, under pretext of a new departure.

"I am to be the head of a family," he said to her; "you know the reputation of land-stewards; my father-in-law is a republican of Roman austerity, and a man of influence as well; I want to prove to him that I am as upright as he."

Mademoiselle Laguerre accepted his accounts at once in very flattering terms.

In those earlier days the steward had endeavored, in order to win the confidence of Madame des Aigues (as Mademoiselle was then called) to repress the depredations of the peasantry; fearing, and not without reason, that the revenues would suffer too severely, and that his private bonus from the buyers of the timber would sensibly diminish. But in those days the sovereign people felt the soil was their own everywhere; Madame was afraid of the surrounding kings and told her Richelieu that the first desire of her soul was to die in peace. The revenues of the late singer were so far in excess of her expenses that she allowed all the worst and, as it proved, fatal precedents to be established. To avoid

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a lawsuit, she allowed the neighbors to encroach upon her land. Knowing that the park walls were sufficient protection, she did not fear any interruption of her personal comfort, and cared for nothing but her peaceful existence, true philosopher that she was! A few thousands a year more or less, the indemnities exacted by the wood-merchants for the damages committed by the peasants, — what were they to a careless and extravagant Opera-girl, who had gained her hundred thousand francs a year at the cost of pleasure only, and who had just submitted, without a word of remonstrance, to a reduction of two thirds of an income of sixty thousand francs?

"Dear me!" she said, in the easy tone of the wantons of the old time, "people must live, even if they are republicans."

The terrible Mademoiselle Cochet, her maid and female vizier, had tried to enlighten her mistress when she saw the ascendency Gaubertin was obtaining over one whom he began by calling "Madame" in defiance of the revolutionary laws about equality; but Gaubertin, in his turn, enlightened Mademoiselle Cochet by showing her a so-called denunciation sent to his father, the prosecuting attorney, in which she was vehemently accused of corresponding with Pitt and Coburg. From that time forward the two powers went on shares — shares *à la* Montgomery. Cochet praised Gaubertin to Madame, and Gaubertin praised Cochet. The waiting-maid had already made her own bed, and knew she was down for sixty thousand francs in the will. Madame could not do without Cochet, to whom she was accustomed. The woman knew the secrets of dear mistress's toilet; she alone could put dear mistress to sleep at



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night with her gossip, and get her up in the morning with her flattery; to the day of dear mistress's death the maid never could see the slightest change in her, and when dear mistress lay in her coffin, she doubtless thought she had never seen her looking so well.

The annual pickings of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet, their wages and perquisites, became so large that the most affectionate relatives could not possibly have been more devoted than they to their kindly mistress. There is really no describing how a swindler cossets his dupe. A mother is not so tender nor so solicitous for a beloved daughter as the practitioner of tartuferie for his milch cow. What brilliant success attends the performance of Tartufe behind the closed doors of a home! It is worth more than friendship. Molière died too soon; he would otherwise have shown us the misery of Orgon, wearied by his family, harassed by his children, regretting the blandishments of Tartufe, and thinking to himself, "Ah, those were the good times!"

During the last eight years of her life the mistress of Les Aigues received only thirty thousand francs of the fifty thousand really yielded by the estate. Gaubertin had reached the same administrative results as his predecessor, though farm rents and territorial products were notably increased between 1791 and 1815, — not to speak of Madame's continual purchases. But Gaubertin's fixed idea of acquiring Les Aigues at the old lady's death led him to depreciate the value of the magnificent estate in the matter of its ostensible revenues. Mademoiselle Cochet, a sharer in the scheme, was also to share the profits. As the ex-divinity in her declining years received an income of twenty thousand

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francs from the Funds called consolidated (how readily the tongue of politics can jest!), and with difficulty spent the said sum yearly, she was much surprised at the annual purchases made by the steward to use up the accumulating revenues, remembering how in former times she had always drawn them in advance. The result of having few wants in her old age seemed, to her mind, a proof of the honesty and uprightness of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet.

"Two pearls!" she said to the persons who came to see her.

Gaubertin kept his accounts with apparent honesty. He entered all rentals duly. Everything that could strike the feeble mind of the late singer, so far as arithmetic went, was clear and precise. The steward took his commission on all disbursements, — on the costs of working the estate, on rentals made, on suits brought, on work done, on repairs of every kind, — details which Madame never dreamed of verifying, and for which he sometimes charged twice over by collusion with the contractors, whose silence was bought by permission to charge the highest prices. These methods of dealing conciliated public opinion in favor of Gaubertin, while Madame's praise was on every lip; for besides the payments she disbursed for work, she gave away large sums of money in alms.

"May God preserve her, the dear lady!" was heard on all sides.

The truth was, everybody got something out of her, either indirectly or as a downright gift. In reprisals, as it were, of her youth the old actress was pillaged; so discreetly pillaged, however, that those who throve upon her kept their depredations within certain limits

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lest even her eyes might be opened and she should sell Les Aigues and return to Paris.

This system of "pickings" was, alas! the cause of Paul-Louis Courier's assassination; he committed the mistake of advertising the sale of his estate and allowing it to be known that he should take away his wife, on whom a number of the Tonsards of Lorraine were battening. Fearing to lose Madame des Aigues, the marauders on the estate forbore to cut the young trees, unless pushed to extremities by finding no branches within reach of shears fastened to long poles. In the interests of robbery, they did as little harm as they could; although, during the last years of Madame's life, the habit of cutting wood became more and more barefaced. On certain clear nights not less than two hundred bundles were taken. As to the gleaning of fields and vineyards, Les Aigues lost, as Sibilet had pointed out, not less than one quarter of its products.

Madame des Aigues had forbidden Cochet to marry during her lifetime, with the selfishness often shown in all countries by a mistress to a maid; which is not more irrational than the mania for keeping possession, until our last gasp, of property that is utterly useless to our material comfort, at the risk of being poisoned by impatient heirs. Twenty days after the old lady's burial Mademoiselle Cochet married the brigadier of the gendarmerie of Soulanges, named Soudry, a handsome man, forty-two years of age, who, ever since 1800 (in which year the gendarmerie was formed) had come every day to Les Aigues to see the waiting-maid, and dined with her at least three times a week at the Gaubertins'.

During Madame's lifetime dinner was served to her

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and to her company by themselves. Neither Cochet nor Gaubertin, in spite of their great familiarity with the mistress, was ever admitted to her table; the leading lady of the Académie Royale retained, to her last hour, her sense of etiquette, her style of dress, her rouge and her heeled slippers, her carriage, her servants, and the majesty of her deportment. A divinity at the Opera, a divinity within her range of Parisian social life, she continued a divinity in the country solitudes, where her memory is still worshipped, and still holds its own against that of the old monarchy in the minds of the "best society" of Soulanges.

Soudry, who had paid his addresses to Mademoiselle Cochet from the time he first came into the neighborhood, owned the finest house in Soulanges, an income of six thousand francs, and the prospect of a retiring pension whenever he should quit the service. As soon as Cochet became Madame Soudry she was treated with great consideration in the town. Though she kept the strictest secrecy as to the amount of her savings, — which were intrusted, like those of Gaubertin, to the commissary of wine-merchants of the department in Paris, a certain Leclercq, a native of Soulanges, to whom Gaubertin supplied funds as sleeping partner in his business, — public opinion credited the former waiting-maid with one of the largest fortunes in the little town of twelve hundred inhabitants.

To the great astonishment of every one, Monsieur and Madame Soudry acknowledged as legitimate, in their marriage contract, a natural son of the gendarme, to whom, in future, Madame Soudry's fortune was to descend. At the time when this son was legally supplied with a mother, he had just ended his law studies

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in Paris and was about to enter into practice, with the intention of fitting himself for the magistracy.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that a mutual understanding of twenty years had produced the closest intimacy between the families of Gaubertin and Soudry. Both reciprocally declared themselves, to the end of their days, *urbi et orbi*, to be the most upright and honorable persons in all France. Such community of interests, based on mutual knowledge of the secret spots on the white garment of conscience, is one of the ties least recognized and hardest to untie in this low world. You who read this social drama, have you never felt a conviction as to two persons which has led you to say to yourself, in order to explain the continuance of a certain faithful devotion which made your own egotism blush, "They must surely have committed some crime together"?

After an administration of twenty-five years, Gaubertin, the land-steward, found himself in possession of six hundred thousand francs in money, and Cochet had accumulated nearly two hundred and fifty thousand. The rapid and constant turning over and over of their funds in the hands of Leclercq and Company (on the quai Béthune, Île Saint Louis, rivals of the famous house of Grandet) was a great assistance to the fortunes of all parties. On the death of Mademoiselle Laguerre, Jenny, the steward's eldest daughter was asked in marriage by Leclercq. Gaubertin expected at that time to become owner of Les Aigues by means of a plot laid in the private office of Lupin, the notary, whom the steward had set up and maintained in business within the last twelve years.

Lupin, a son of the former steward of the estate of

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Soulanges, had lent himself to various slight peculations, — investments at fifty per cent below par, notices published surreptitiously, and all the other manœuvres, unhappily common in the provinces, to wrap a mantle, as the saying is, over clandestine manipulations of property. Lately a company has been formed in Paris, so they say, to levy contributions upon such plotters under a threat of outbidding them. But in 1816 France was not, as it is now, lighted by a flaming publicity; the accomplices might safely count on dividing Les Aigues among them, that is, between Cochet, the notary, and Gaubertin, the latter of whom reserved to himself, *in petto*, the intention of buying the others out for a sum down, as soon as the property fairly stood in his own name. The lawyer employed by the notary to manage the sale of the estate by auction was under personal obligations to Gaubertin, so that he favored the spoliation of the heirs, unless any of the eleven farmers of Picardy should take it into their heads to think they were cheated, and inquire into the real value of the property.

Just as those interested expected to find their fortunes made, a lawyer came from Paris on the evening before the final settlement, and employed a notary at Ville-aux-Fayes, who happened to be one of his former clerks, to buy the estate of Les Aigues, which he did for eleven hundred thousand francs. None of the conspirators dared outbid an offer of eleven hundred thousand francs. Gaubertin suspected some treachery on Soudry's part, and Soudry and Lupin thought they were tricked by Gaubertin. But a statement on the part of the purchasing agent, the notary of Ville-aux-Fayes, disabused them of these suspicions. The latter,

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though suspecting the plan formed by Gaubertin, Lupin, and Soudry, refrained from informing the lawyer in Paris, for the reason that if the new owners indiscreetly repeated his words, he would have too many enemies at his heels to be able to stay where he was. This reticence, peculiar to provincials, was in this particular case amply justified by succeeding events. If the dwellers in the provinces are dissemblers, they are forced to be so; their excuse lies in the danger expressed in the old proverb, "We must howl with the wolves," a meaning which underlies the character of Philinte.

When General Montcornet took possession of Les Aigues, Gaubertin was no longer rich enough to give up his place. In order to marry his daughter to a rich banker he was obliged to give her a dowry of two hundred thousand francs; he had to pay thirty thousand for his son's practice; and all that remained of his accumulations was three hundred and seventy thousand, out of which he would be forced, sooner or later, to pay the dowry of his remaining daughter, Élise, for whom he hoped to arrange a marriage at least as good as that of her sister. The steward determined to study the general, in order to find out if he could disgust him with the place, — hoping still to be able to carry out his defeated plan in his own interests.

With the peculiar instinct which characterizes those who make their fortunes by craft, Gaubertin believed in a resemblance of nature (which was not improbable) between an old soldier and an old Opera-singer. An actress, and a general of the Empire, — surely they would have the same extravagant habits, the same careless prodigality? To the one as to the other,

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riches came capriciously and by lucky chances. If some soldiers are wily and astute and clever politicians, they are exceptions; a soldier is, usually, especially an accomplished cavalry officer like Montcornet, guileless, confident, a novice in business, and little fitted to understand details in the management of an estate. Gaubertin flattered himself that he could catch and hold the general with the same net in which Mademoiselle Laguerre had finished her days. But it so happened that the Emperor had once, intentionally, allowed Montcornet to play the same game in Pomerania that Gaubertin was playing at Les Aigues; consequently, the general fully understood a system of plundering.

In planting cabbages, to use the expression of the first Duc de Biron, the old cuirassier sought to divert his mind, by occupation, from dwelling on his fall. Though he had yielded his *corps d'armée* to the Bourbons, that duty (performed by other generals and termed the disbanding of the army of the Loire) could not atone for the crime of having followed the man of the Hundred-Days to his last battle-field. In presence of the allied army it was impossible for the peer of 1815 to remain in the service, still less at the Luxembourg. Accordingly, Montcornet betook himself to the country by advice of a dismissed marshal, to plunder Nature herself. The general was not deficient in the special cunning of an old military fox; and after he had spent a few days in examining his new property, he saw that Gaubertin was a steward of the old system, — a swindler, such as the dukes and marshals of the Empire, those mushrooms bred from the common earth, were well acquainted with.

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The wily general, soon aware of Gaubertin's great experience in rural administration, felt it was politic to keep well with him until he had himself learned the secrets of it; accordingly, he passed himself off as another Mademoiselle Laguerre, a course which lulled the steward into false security. This apparent simple-mindedness lasted all the time that it took the general to learn the strength and weakness of Les Aigues, to master the details of its revenues and the manner of collecting them, and to ascertain how and where the robberies occurred, together with the betterments and economies which ought to be undertaken. Then, one fine morning, having caught Gaubertin with his hand in the bag, as the saying is, the general flew into one of those rages peculiar to the imperial conquerors of many lands. In doing so he committed a capital blunder, — one that would have ruined the whole life of a man of less wealth and less consistency than himself, and from which came the evils, both small and great, with which the present history teems. Brought up in the imperial school, accustomed to deal with men as a dictator, and full of contempt for "civilians," Montcornet did not trouble himself to wear gloves when it came to putting a rascal of a land-steward out of doors. Civil life and its precautions were things unknown to the soldier already embittered by his loss of rank. He humiliated Gaubertin ruthlessly, though the latter drew the harsh treatment upon himself by a cynical reply which roused Montcornet's anger.

"You are living off my land," said the general, with jesting severity.

"Do you think I can live off the sky?" returned Gaubertin, with a sneer.

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"Out of my sight, blackguard! I dismiss you!" cried the general, striking him with his whip, — blows which the steward always denied having received, for they were given behind closed doors.

"I shall not go without my release in full," said Gaubertin, coldly, keeping at a distance from the enraged soldier.

"We will see what is thought of you in a police court," replied Montcornet, shrugging his shoulders.

Hearing the threat, Gaubertin looked at the general and smiled. The smile had the effect of relaxing Montcornet's arms as though the sinews had been cut. We must explain that smile.

For the last two years Gaubertin's brother-in-law, a man named Gendrin, long a justice of the municipal court of Ville-aux-Fayes, had become the president of that court through the influence of the Comte de Soulanges. The latter was made peer of France in 1814, and remained faithful to the Bourbons during the Hundred-Days, therefore the Keeper of the Seals readily granted an appointment at his request. This relationship gave Gaubertin a certain importance in the country. The president of the court of a little town is, relatively, a greater personage than the president of one of the royal courts of a great city, who has various equals, such as generals, bishops, and prefects; whereas the judge of the court of a small town has none, — the attorney-general and the sub-prefect being removable at will. Young Soudry, a companion of Gaubertin's son in Paris as well as at Les Aigues, had just been appointed assistant attorney in the capital of the department. Before the elder Soudry, a quartermaster in the artillery, became a brigadier of gendarmes, he

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had been wounded in a skirmish while defending Monsieur de Soulanges, then adjutant-general. At the time of the creation of the gendarmerie, the Comte de Soulanges, who by that time had become a colonel, asked for a brigade for his former protector, and later still he solicited the post we have named for the younger Soudry. Besides all these influences, the marriage of Mademoiselle Gaubertin with a wealthy banker of the quai Béthune made the unjust steward feel that he was far stronger in the community than a lieutenant-general driven into retirement.

If this history provided no other instruction than that offered by the quarrel between the general and his steward, it would still be useful to many persons as a lesson for their conduct in life. He who reads Machiavelli profitably, knows that human prudence consists in never threatening; in doing but not saying; in promoting the retreat of an enemy and never stepping, as the saying is, on the tail of the serpent; and in avoiding, as one would murder, the infliction of a blow to the self-love of any one lower than one's self. An injury done to a person's interest, no matter how great it may be at the time, is forgiven or explained in the long run; but self-love, vanity, never ceases to bleed from a wound given, and never forgives it. The moral being is actually more sensitive, more living as it were, than the physical being. The heart and the blood are less impressible than the nerves. In short, our inward being rules us, no matter what we do. You may reconcile two families who have half-killed each other, as in Brittany and in La Vendée during the civil wars, but you can no more reconcile the calumniators and the calumniated than you can the spoilers and the despoiled. It is only

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in epic poems that men curse each other before they kill. The savage, and the peasant who is much like a savage, seldom speak unless to deceive an enemy. Ever since 1789 France has been trying to make men believe, against all evidence, that they are equal. To say to a man, "You are a swindler," may be taken as a joke; but to catch him in the act and prove it to him with a cane on his back, to threaten him with a police-court and not follow up the threat, is to remind him of the inequality of conditions. If the masses will not brook any species of superiority, is it likely that a swindler will forgive that of an honest man?

Montcornet might have dismissed his steward under pretext of paying off a military obligation by putting some old soldier in his place; Gaubertin and the general would have understood the matter, and the latter, by sparing the steward's self-love would have given him a chance to withdraw quietly. Gaubertin, in that case, would have left his late employer in peace, and forgotten his overthrow in other land speculations; possibly he might have taken himself and his savings to Paris for investment. But being, as he was, ignominiously dismissed, the man conceived against his late master one of those bitter hatreds which are literally a part of existence in provincial life, the persistency, duration, and plots of which would astonish diplomatists who are trained to let nothing astonish them. A burning desire for vengeance led him to settle at Ville-aux-Fayes, and to take a position where he could injure Montcornet and stir up sufficient enmity against to force him to sell Les Aigues.

The general was deceived by appearances; for Gaubertin's external behavior was not of a nature to warn

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or to alarm him. The late steward followed his old custom of pretending, not exactly poverty, but limited means. For years he had talked of his wife and three children, and the heavy expenses of a large family. Mademoiselle Laguerre, to whom he declared himself too poor to educate his son in Paris, paid the costs herself, and allowed her dear godson (for she was Claude Gaubertin's sponsor) two thousand francs a year.

The day after the quarrel, Gaubertin came, with a keeper named Courtecuisse, and demanded with much insolence his release in full of all claims, showing the general the one he had obtained from his late mistress in such flattering terms, and asking, ironically, that a search should be made for the property, real and otherwise, which he was supposed to have stolen. If he had received fees from the wood-merchants on their purchases and from the farmers on their leases, Mademoiselle Laguerre, he said, had always allowed it; not only did she gain by the bargains he made, but everything went on smoothly without troubling her. The country-people would have died, he remarked, for Mademoiselle, whereas the general was laying up for himself a store of difficulties.

Gaubertin — and this trait is frequently to be seen in the majority of those professions in which the property of others can be taken by means not foreseen by the Code — considered himself a perfectly honest man. In the first place, he had so long had possession of the money extorted from Mademoiselle Laguerre's farmers through fear, and paid in assignats, that he regarded it as legitimately acquired. It was a mere matter of exchange. He thought that in the end he should run quite as much risk with coin as with paper. Besides,

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legally, Mademoiselle had no right to receive any payment except in assignats. "Legally" is a fine, robust adverb, which bolsters up many a fortune! Moreover, he reflected that ever since great estates and land-agents had existed, that is, ever since the origin of society, the said agents had set up, for their own use, an argument such as we find our cooks using in the present day. Here it is in its simplicity: —

"If my mistress," says the cook, "went to market herself, she would have to pay more for her provisions than I charge her; she is the gainer, and the profits I make do more good in my hands than in those of the dealers."

"If Mademoiselle," thought Gaubertin, "were to manage Les Aigues herself, she would never get thirty thousand francs a year out of it; the peasants, the dealers, the workmen would rob her of the rest. It is much better that I should have it, and so enable her to live in peace."

The Catholic religion, and it alone, is able to prevent these capitulations of conscience. But, ever since 1789 religion has no influence on two thirds of the French people. The peasants, whose minds are keen and whose poverty drives them to imitation, had reached, specially in the valley of Les Aigues, a frightful state of demoralization. They went to mass on Sundays, but only at the outside of the church, where it was their custom to meet and transact business and make their weekly bargains.

We can now estimate the extent of the evil done by the careless indifference of the great singer to the management of her property. Mademoiselle Laguerre betrayed, through mere selfishness, the interests of

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those who owned property, who are held in perpetual hatred by those who own none. Since 1792 the landowners of Paris have become of necessity a combined body. If, alas, the feudal families, less numerous than the middle-class families, did not perceive the necessity of combining in 1400 under Louis XI., nor in 1600 under Richelieu, can we expect that in this nineteenth century of progress the middle classes will prove to be more permanently and solidly combined than the old nobility? An oligarchy of a hundred thousand rich men presents all the dangers of a democracy with none of its advantages. The principle of "every man for himself and for his own," the selfishness of individual interests, will kill the oligarchical selfishness so necessary to the existence of modern society, and which England has practised with such success for the last three centuries. Whatever may be said or done, landowners will never understand the necessity of the sort of internal discipline which made the Church such an admirable model of government, until, too late, they find themselves in danger from one another. The audacity with which communism, that living and acting logic of democracy, attacks society from the moral side, shows plainly that the Samson of to-day, grown prudent, is undermining the foundations of the cellar, instead of shaking the pillars of the hall.

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## VII.

### CERTAIN LOST SOCIAL SPECIES.

THE estate of Les Aigues could not do without a steward; for the general had no intention of renouncing his winter pleasures in Paris, where he owned a fine house in the rue Neuve-des-Mathurins. He therefore looked about for a successor to Gaubertin; but it is very certain that his search was not as eager as that of Gaubertin himself, who was seeking for the right person to put in his way.

Of all confidential positions there is none that requires more trained knowledge of its kind, or more activity, than that of land-steward to a great estate. The difficulty of finding the right man is only fully known to those wealthy landlords whose property lies beyond a certain circle around Paris, beginning at a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. At that point agricultural productions for the markets of Paris, which warrant rentals on long leases (collected often by other tenants who are rich themselves), cease to be cultivated. The farmers who raise them drive to the city in their own cabriolets to pay their rents in good bank-bills, unless they send the money through their agents in the markets. For this reason, the farms of the Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, the Oise, the Eure-et-Loir, the Lower Seine, and the Loiret are so desirable that capital cannot always be invested there at one and a half per cent. Compared to the returns on estates in Holland,



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England, and Belgium, this result is enormous. But at one hundred miles from Paris an estate requires such variety of working, its products are so different in kind, that it becomes a business, with all the risks attendant on manufacturing. The wealthy owner is really a merchant, forced to look for a market for his products, like the owner of ironworks or cotton factories. He does not even escape competition; the peasant, the small proprietor, is at his heels with an avidity which leads to transactions to which well-bred persons cannot condescend.

A land-steward must understand surveying, the customs of the locality, the methods of sale and of labor, together with a little quibbling in the interests of those he serves; he must also understand book-keeping and commercial matters, and be in perfect health, with a liking for active life and horse exercise. His duty being to represent his master and to be always in communication with him, the steward ought not to be a man of the people. As the salary of his office seldom exceeds three thousand francs, the problem seems insoluble. How is it possible to obtain so many qualifications for such a very moderate price, — in a region, moreover, where the men who are provided with them are admissible to all other employments? Bring down a stranger to fill the place, and you will pay dear for the experience he must acquire. Train a young man on the spot, and you are more than likely to get a thorn of ingratitude in your side. It therefore becomes necessary to choose between incompetent honesty, which injures your property through its blindness and inertia, and the cleverness which looks out for itself. Hence the social nomenclature and natural his-

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tory of land-stewards as defined by a great Polish noble.

"There are," he said, "two kinds of stewards: he who thinks only of himself, and he who thinks of himself and of us; happy the land-owner who lays his hands on the latter! As for the steward who would think only of us, he is not to be met with."

Elsewhere can be found a steward who thought of his master's interests as well as of his own. ("Un Début dans la vie," "Scènes de la vie privée.") Gaubertin is the steward who thinks of himself only. To represent the third figure of the problem would be to hold up to public admiration a very unlikely personage, yet one that was not unknown to the old nobility, though he has, alas! disappeared with them. (See "Le Cabinet des Antiques," "Scènes de la vie de province.") Through the endless subdivision of fortunes aristocratic habits and customs are inevitably changed. If there be not now in France twenty great fortunes managed by intendants, in fifty years from now there will not be a hundred estates in the hands of stewards, unless a great change is made in the law. Every land-owner will be brought by that time to look after his own interests.

This transformation, already begun, suggested the following answer of a clever woman when asked why, since 1830, she stayed in Paris during the summer. "Because," she said, "I do not care to visit châteaux which are now turned into farms." What is to be the future of this question, getting daily more and more imperative, — that of man to man, the poor man and the rich man? This book is written to throw some light upon that terrible social question.

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It is easy to understand the perplexities which assailed the general after he had dismissed Gaubertin. While saying to himself, vaguely, like other persons free to do or not to do a thing, "I'll dismiss that scamp;" he had overlooked the risk and forgotten the explosion of his boiling anger, — the anger of a choleric fire-eater at the moment when a flagrant imposition forced him to raise the lids of his wilfully blind eyes.

Montcornet, a land-owner for the first time and a denizen of Paris, had not provided himself with a steward before coming to Les Aigues; but after studying the neighborhood carefully he saw it was indispensable to a man like himself to have an intermediary to manage so many persons of low degree.

Gaubertin, who discovered during the excitement of the scene (which lasted more than two hours) the difficulties in which the general would soon be involved, jumped on his pony after leaving the room where the quarrel took place, and galloped to Soulanges to consult the Soudrys. At his first words, "The general and I have parted; whom can we put in my place without his suspecting it?" the Soudrys understood their friend's wishes. Do not forget that Soudry, for the last seventeen years chief of police of the canton, was doubly shrewd through his wife, an adept in the particular wiliness of a waiting-maid of an Opera divinity.

"We may go far," said Madame Soudry, "before we find any one to suit the place as well as our poor Sibilet."

"Made to order!" exclaimed Gaubertin, still scarlet with mortification. "Lupin," he added, turning to the notary who was present, "go to Ville-aux-Fayes and

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whisper it to Maréchal, in case that big fire-eater asks his advice."

Maréchal was the lawyer whom his former patron, when buying Les Aigues for the general, had recommended to Monsieur de Montcornet as legal adviser.

Sibilet, eldest son of the clerk of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes, a notary's clerk, without a penny of his own, and twenty-five years old, had fallen in love with the daughter of the chief magistrate of Soulanges. The latter, named Sarcus, had a salary of fifteen hundred francs, and was married to a woman without fortune, the eldest sister of Monsieur Vermut, the apothecary of Soulanges. Though an only daughter, Mademoiselle Sarcus, whose beauty was her only dowry, could scarcely have lived on the salary paid to a notary's clerk in the provinces. Young Sibilet, a relative of Gaubertin, by a connection rather difficult to trace through family ramifications which make members of the middle classes in all the smaller towns cousins to each other, owed a modest position in a government office to the assistance of his father and Gaubertin. The unlucky fellow had the terrible happiness of being the father of two children in three years. His own father, blessed with five, was unable to assist him. His wife's father owned nothing beside his house at Soulanges and an income of two thousand francs. Madame Sibilet the younger spent most of her time at her father's home with her two children, where Adolphe Sibilet, whose official duty obliged him to travel through the department, came to see her from time to time.

Gaubertin's exclamation, though easy to understand from this summary of young Sibilet's life, needs a few more explanatory details.

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Adolphe Sibilet, supremely unlucky, as we have shown by the foregoing sketch of him, was one of those men who cannot reach the heart of a woman except by way of the altar and the mayor's office. Endowed with the suppleness of a steel-spring, he yielded to pressure, certain to revert to his first thought. This treacherous habit is prompted by cowardice; but the business training which Sibilet underwent in the office of a provincial notary had taught him the art of concealing this defect under a gruff manner which simulated a strength he did not possess. Many false natures mask their hollowness in this way; be rough with them in return and the effect produced is that of a balloon collapsed by a prick. Such was Sibilet. But as most men are not observers, and as among observers three fourths observe only after a thing has taken place, Adolphe Sibilet's grumbling manner was considered the result of an honest frankness, of a capacity much praised by his master, and of a stubborn uprightness which no temptation could shake. Some men are as much benefited by their defects as others by their good qualities.

Adeline Sarcus, a pretty young woman, brought up by a mother (who died three years before her marriage) as well as a mother can educate an only daughter in a remote country town, was in love with the handsome son of Lupin, the Soulanges notary. At the first signs of this romance, old Lupin, who intended to marry his son to Mademoiselle Élise Gaubertin, lost no time in sending young Amaury Lupin to Paris, to the care of his friend and correspondent Crottat, the notary, where, under pretext of drawing deeds and contracts, Amaury committed a variety of foolish acts, and made debts.

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being led thereto by a certain Georges Marest, a clerk in the same office, but a rich young man, who revealed to him the mysteries of Parisian life. By this time Lupin the elder went to Paris to bring back his son, Adeline Sarcus had become Madame Sibilet. In fact, when the adoring Adolphe offered himself, her father, the old magistrate, prompted by young Lupin's father, hastened the marriage, to which Adeline yielded in sheer despair.

The situation of clerk in a government registration office is not a career. It is, like other such places which admit of no rise, one of the many holes of the government sieve. Those who start in life in these holes (the topographical, the professorial, the highway-and-canal departments) are apt to discover, invariably too late, that cleverer men than they, seated beside them, are fed, as the Opposition writers say, on the sweat of the people, every time the sieve dips down into the taxation-pot by means of a machine called the budget. Adolphe, working early and late and earning little, soon found out the barren depths of his hole; and his thoughts busied themselves, as he trotted from township to township, spending his salary in shoe-leather and costs of travelling, with how to find a permanent and more profitable place.

No one can imagine, unless he happens to squint and to have two legitimate children, what ambitions three years of misery and love had developed in this young man, who squinted both in mind and vision, and whose happiness halted, as it were, on one leg. The chief cause of secret evil deeds and hidden meanness is, perhaps, an incompleted happiness. Man can better bear a state of hopeless misery than those terrible

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alternations of love and sunshine with continual rain. If the body contracts disease, the mind contracts the leprosy of envy. In petty minds that leprosy becomes a base and brutal cupidity, both insolent and shrinking; in cultivated minds it fosters anti-social doctrines, which serve a man as footholds by which to rise above his superiors. May we not dignify with the title of proverb the pregnant saying, "Tell me what thou hast, and I will tell thee of what thou art thinking?"

Though Adolphe loved his wife, his hourly thought was: "I have made a mistake; I have three balls and chains, but I have only two legs. I ought to have made my fortune before I married. I could have found an Adeline any day; but Adeline stands in the way of my getting a fortune now."

Adolphe had been to see his relation Gaubertin three times in three years. A few words exchanged between them let Gaubertin see the muck of a soul ready to ferment under the hot temptations of legal robbery. He warily sounded a nature that could be warped to the exigencies of any plan, provided it was profitable. At each of the three visits Sibilet grumbled at his fate.

"Employ me, cousin," he said; "take me as a clerk and make me your successor. You shall see how I work. I am capable of overthrowing mountains to give my Adeline, I won't say luxury, but a modest competence. You made Monsieur Leclercq's fortune; why won't you put me in a bank in Paris?"

"Some day, later on, I'll find you a place," Gaubertin would say; "meantime make friends and acquaintance; such things help."

Under these circumstances the letter which Madame

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Soudry hastily dispatched brought Sibilet to Soulanges through a region of castles in the air. His father-in-law, Sarcus, whom the Soudrys advised to take steps in the interest of his daughter, had gone in the morning to see the general and to propose Adolphe for the vacant post. By advice of Madame Soudry, who was the oracle of the little town, the worthy man had taken his daughter with him; and the sight of her had had a favorable effect upon the Comte de Montcornet.

"I shall not decide," he answered, "without thoroughly informing myself about all applicants; but I will not look elsewhere until I have examined whether or not your son-in-law possesses the requirements for the place." Then, turning to Madame Sibilet he added, "The satisfaction of settling so charming a person at Les Aigues —"

"The mother of two children, general," said Adeline, adroitly, to evade the gallantry of the old cuirassier.

All the general's inquiries were cleverly anticipated by the Soudrys, Gaubertin, and Lupin, who quietly obtained for their candidate the influence of the leading lawyers in the capital of the department, where a royal court held sessions, — such as Counsellor Gendrin, a distant relative of the judge at Ville-aux-Fayes; Baron Bourlac, attorney-general; and another counsellor named Sarcus, a cousin thrice removed of the candidate. The verdict of every one to whom the general applied was favorable to the poor clerk, — "so interesting," as they called him. His marriage had made Sibilet as irreproachable as a novel of Miss Edgeworth's, and presented him, moreover, in the light of a disinterested man.

The time which the dismissed steward remained at

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Les Aigues until his successor could be appointed was employed in creating troubles and annoyances for his late master; one of the little scenes which he thus played off will give an idea of several others.

The morning of his final departure he contrived to meet, as it were accidentally, Courtecuisse, the only keeper then employed at Les Aigues, the great extent of which really needed at least three.

"Well, Monsieur Gaubertin," said Courtecuisse, "so you have had trouble with the count?"

"Who told you that?" answered Gaubertin. "Well, yes; the general expected to order us about as he did his cavalry; he did n't know Burgundians. The count is not satisfied with my services, and as I am not satisfied with his ways, we have dismissed each other, almost with fisticuffs, for he raged like a whirlwind. Take care of yourself, Courtecuisse! Ah! my dear fellow, I expected to give you a better master."

"I know that," said the keeper, "and I'd have served you well. Hang it, when friends have known each other for twenty years, you know! You put me here in the days of the poor dear sainted Madame. Ah, what a good woman she was! none like her now! The place has lost a mother."

"Look here, Courtecuisse, if you are willing, you might help us to a fine stroke."

"Then you are going to stay here? I heard you were off to Paris."

"No; I shall wait to see how things turn out; meantime I shall do business at Ville-aux-Fayes. The general does n't know what he is dealing with in these parts; he 'll make himself hated, don't you see? I shall wait for what turns up. Do your work here

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gently; he 'll tell you to manage the people with a high hand, for he begins to see where his crops and his woods are running to; but you 'll not be such a fool as to let the country-folk maul you, and perhaps worse, for the sake of his timber."

"But he would send me away, dear Monsieur Gaubertin, he would get rid of me! and you know how happy I am living there at the gate of the Avonne."

"The general will soon get sick of the whole place," replied Gaubertin; "you would n't be long out even if he did happen to send you away. Besides, you know those woods," he added, waving his hand at the landscape; "I am stronger there than the masters."

This conversation took place in an open field.

"Those *Arminac* Parisian fellows ought to stay in their own mud," said the keeper.

Ever since the quarrels of the fifteenth century the word *Arminac* (Armagnacs, Parisians, enemies of the Dukes of Burgundy) has continued to be an insulting term along the borders of Upper Burgundy, where it is differently corrupted according to locality.

"He 'll go back to it when beaten," said Gaubertin, "and we 'll plough up the park; for it is robbing the people to allow a man to keep nine hundred acres of the best land in the valley for his own pleasure."

"Four hundred families could get their living from it," said Courtecuisse.

"If you want two acres for yourself you must help us to drive that cur out," remarked Gaubertin.

At the very moment that Gaubertin was fulminating this sentence of excommunication, the worthy Sarcus was presenting his son-in-law Sibilet to the Comte de Montcornet. They had come with Adeline and the

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children in a wicker carryall, lent by Sarcus's clerk, a Monsieur Gourdon, brother of the Soulanges doctor, who was richer than the magistrate himself. The general, pleased with the candor and dignity of the justice of the peace, and with the graceful bearing of Adeline (both giving pledges in good faith, for they were totally ignorant of the plans of Gaubertin), at once granted all requests and gave such advantages to the family of the new land-steward as to make the position equal to that of a sub-prefect of the first class.

A lodge, built by Bouret as an object in the landscape and also for a home for the steward, an elegant little building, the architecture of which was sufficiently shown in the description of the gate of Blangy, was promised to the Sibilets for their residence. The general also conceded the horse which Mademoiselle Laguerre had provided for Gaubertin, in consideration of the size of the estate and the distance he had to go to the markets where the business of the property was transacted. He allowed two hundred bushels of wheat, three hogsheads of wine, wood in sufficient quantity, oats and barley in abundance, and three per cent on all receipts of income. Where the latter in Mademoiselle Laguerre's time had amounted to forty thousand francs, the general now, in 1818, in view of the purchases of land which Gaubertin had made for her, expected to receive at least sixty thousand. The new land-steward might therefore receive before long some two thousand francs in money. Lodged, fed, warmed, relieved of taxes, the costs of a horse and a poultry-yard defrayed for him, and allowed to plant a kitchen-garden, with no questions asked as to the day's work of the gardener, certainly such advantages represented much

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more than another two thousand francs; and for a man who was earning a miserable salary of twelve hundred francs in a government office to step into the stewardship of Les Aigues was a change from poverty to opulence.

"Be faithful to my interests," said the general, "and I shall have more to say to you. Doubtless I could get the collection of the rents of Conches, Blangy, and Cerneux taken away from the collection of those of Soulanges and given to you. In short, when you bring me in a clear sixty thousand a year from Les Aigues you shall be still further rewarded."

Unfortunately, the worthy justice and his daughter, in the flush of their joy, told Madame Soudry the promise the general had made about these collections, without reflecting that the present collector of Soulanges, a man named Guerbet, brother of the postmaster of Conches, was closely allied, as we shall see later, with Gaubertin and the Gendrins.

"It won't be so easy to do it, my dear," said Madame Soudry; "but don't prevent the general from making the attempt; it is wonderful how easily difficult things are done in Paris. I have seen the Chevalier Glück at dear Madame's feet to get her to sing his music, and she did, — she who adored Piccini, one of the finest men of his day; never did *he* come into Madame's room without catching me round the waist and calling me a dear rogue."

"Ha!" cried Soudry, when his wife reported this news, "does he think he is going to lead the country by the nose, and upset everything to please himself and make the whole valley march in line, as he did his cuirassiers? These military fellows have a habit of

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command! — but let's have patience; Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Ronquerolles will be on our side. Poor Guerbet! he little suspects who is trying to pluck the best roses out of his garland!"

Père Guerbet, the collector of Soulanges, was the wit, that is to say, the jovial companion of the little town, and a hero in Madame Soudry's salon. Soudry's speech gives a fair idea of the opinion which now grew up against the master of Les Aigues from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, and wherever else the public mind could be reached and poisoned by Gaubertin.

The installation of Sibilet took place in the autumn of 1817. The year 1818 went by without the general being able to set foot at Les Aigues, for his approaching marriage with Mademoiselle de Troisville, which was celebrated in January, 1819, kept him the greater part of the summer near Alençon, in the country-house of his prospective father-in-law. General Montcornet possessed, besides Les Aigues and a magnificent house in Paris, some sixty thousand francs a year in the Funds and the salary of a retired lieutenant-general. Though Napoleon had made him a count of the Empire and given him the following arms, *a field quarterly, the first, azure, bordure or, three pyramids argent; the second, vert, three hunting horns argent; the third, gules, a cannon or on a gun-carriage sable, and, in chief, a crescent or; the fourth, or, a crown vert*, with the motto (eminently of the middle ages!), "Sound the charge," — Montcornet knew very well that he was the son of a cabinet-maker in the faubourg Saint-Antoine, though he was quite ready to forget it. He was eaten up with the desire to be a peer of France, and dreamed of his grand cordon of the Legion of honor, his Saint-Louis

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cross, and his income of one hundred and forty thousand francs. Bitten by the demon of aristocracy, the sight of the blue ribbon put him beside himself. The gallant cuirassier of Essling would have licked up the mud on the Pont-Royal to be invited to the house of a Navarreins, a Lenoncourt, a Grandlieu, a Maufrigneuse, a d'Espard, a Vandenesse, a Verneuil, a Hérouville, or a Chaulieu.

From 1818, when the impossibility of a change in favor of the Bonaparte family was made clear to him, Montcornet had himself trumpeted in the faubourg Saint-Germain by the wives of some of his friends, who offered his hand and heart, his mansion and his fortune in return for an alliance with some great family.

After several attempts, the Duchesse de Carigliano found a match for the general in one of the three branches of the Troisville family, — that of the viscount in the service of Russia ever since 1789, who had returned to France in 1815. The viscount, poor as a younger son, had married a Princess Scherbellof, worth about a million, but the arrival of two sons and three daughters kept him poor. His family, ancient and formerly powerful, now consisted of the Marquis de Troisville, peer of France, head of the house and scutcheon, and two deputies, with numerous offspring, who were busy, for their part, with the budget and the ministries and the court, like fishes round bits of bread. Therefore, when Montcornet was presented by Madame de Carigliano, — the Napoleonic duchess, who was now a most devoted adherent of the Bourbons, he was favorably received. The general asked, in return for his fortune and tender indulgence to his wife, to

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be appointed to the Royal Guard, with the rank of marquis and peer of France; but the branches of the Troisville family would do no more than promise him their support.

"You know what that means," said the duchess to her old friend, who complained of the vagueness of the promise. "They cannot oblige the king to do as they wish; they can only influence him."

Montcornet made Virginie de Troisville his heir in the marriage settlements. Completely under the control of his wife, as Blondet's letter has already shown, he was still without children, but Louis XVIII. had received him, and given him the cordon of Saint-Louis, allowing him to quarter his ridiculous arms with those of the Troisvilles, and promising him the title of marquis as soon as he had deserved the peerage by his services.

A few days after the audience at which this promise had been given, the Duc de Barry was assassinated; the Marsan clique carried the day; the Villèle ministry came into power, and all the wires laid by the Troisvilles were snapped; it became necessary to find new ways of fastening them upon the ministry.

"We must bide our time," said the Troisvilles to Montcornet, who was always overwhelmed with politeness in the faubourg Saint-Germain.

This will explain how it was that the general did not return to Les Aigues until May, 1820.

The ineffable happiness for the son of a shop-keeper of the faubourg Saint-Antoine in possessing a young, elegant, intelligent, and gentle wife, a Troisville, who had given him an entrance to all the salons of the faubourg Saint-Germain, and the delight of making her

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enjoy the pleasures of Paris, had kept him from Les Aigues and made him forget about Gaubertin, even to his very name. In 1820 he took the countess to Burgundy to show her the estate, and he accepted Sibilet's accounts and leases and deeds without looking closely into them; happiness never cavils. The countess, well pleased to find the steward's wife a charming young woman, made presents to her and to the children, with whom she occasionally amused herself. She ordered a few changes at Les Aigues, having sent to Paris for an architect; proposing, to the general's great delight, to spend six months of every year on this magnificent estate. Montcornet's savings were soon spent on the architectural work and the exquisite new furniture sent from Paris. Les Aigues thus received the last touch which made it a choice example of all the diverse elegancies of four centuries.

In 1821 the general was almost peremptorily urged by Sibilet to be at Les Aigues before the month of May. Important matters had to be decided. A lease of nine years, to the amount of thirty thousand francs, granted by Gaubertin in 1812 to a wood-merchant, fell in on the 15th of May of the current year. Sibilet, anxious to prove his rectitude, was unwilling to be responsible for the renewal of the lease. "You know, Monsieur le comte," he wrote, "that I do not choose to profit by such matters." The wood-merchant claimed an indemnity, extorted from Mademoiselle Laguerre, through her hatred of litigation, and shared by him with Gaubertin. This indemnity was based on the injury done to the woods by the peasants, who treated the forest of Les Aigues as if they had a right to cut the timber. Messrs. Gravelot Brothers, wood-merchants in Paris,



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refused to pay their last quarter dues, offering to prove by an expert that the woods were reduced one-fifth in value, through, they said, the injurious precedent established by Mademoiselle Laguerre.

"I have already," wrote Sibilet, "sued these men in the courts at Ville-aux-Fayes, for they have taken legal residence there, on account of this lease, with my old employer, Maître Corbinet. I fear we shall lose the suit."

"It is a question of income, my dear," said the general, showing the letter to his wife. "Will you go down to Les Aigues a little earlier this year than last?"

"Go yourself, and I will follow you when the weather is warmer," said the countess, not sorry to remain in Paris alone.

The general, who knew very well the canker that was eating into his revenues, departed without his wife, resolved to take vigorous measures. In so doing he reckoned, as we shall see, without his Gaubertin.

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## VIII.

### THE GREAT REVOLUTIONS OF A LITTLE VALLEY.

"WELL, Maître Sibilet," said the general to his steward, the morning after his arrival, giving him a familiar title which showed how much he appreciated his services, "so we are, to use a ministerial phrase, at a crisis?"

"Yes, Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, following the general.

The fortunate possessor of Les Aigues was walking up and down in front of the steward's house, along a little terrace where Madame Sibilet grew flowers, at the end of which was a wide stretch of meadow-land watered by the canal which Blondet has described. From this point the château of Les Aigues was seen in the distance, and in like manner the profile, as it were, of the steward's lodge was seen from Les Aigues.

"But," resumed the general, "what's the difficulty? If I do lose the suit against the Gravelots, a money wound is not mortal, and I'll have the leasing of my forest so well advertised that there will be competition, and I shall sell the timber at its true value."

"Business is not done in that way, Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet. "Suppose you get no lessees, what will you do?"

"Cut the timber myself and sell it —"

"You, a wood merchant?" said Sibilet. "Well, without looking at matters here, how would it be in

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Paris? You would have to hire a wood-yard, pay for a license and the taxes, also for the right of navigation, and duties, and the costs of unloading; besides the salary of a trustworthy agent —"

"Yes, it is impracticable," said the general hastily, alarmed at the prospect. "But why can't I find persons to lease the right of cutting timber as before?"

"Monsieur le comte has enemies."

"Who are they?"

"Well, in the first place, Monsieur Gaubertin."

"Do you mean the scoundrel whose place you took?"

"Not so loud, Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, showing fear; "I beg of you, not so loud, — my cook might hear us."

"Do you mean to tell me that I am not to speak on my own estate of a villain who robbed me?" cried the general.

"For the sake of your own peace and comfort, come further away, Monsieur le comte. Monsieur Gaubertin is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Ha! I congratulate Ville-aux-Fayes. Thunder! what a nobly governed town! —"

"Do me the honor to listen, Monsieur le comte, and to believe that I am talking of serious matters which may affect your future life in this place."

"I am listening; let us sit down on this bench here."

"Monsieur le comte, when you dismissed Gaubertin, he had to find some employment, for he was not rich —"

"Not rich! when he stole twenty thousand francs a year from this estate?"

"Monsieur le comte, I don't pretend to excuse him."

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replied Sibilet. "I want to see Les Aigues prosperous, if it were only to prove Gaubertin's dishonesty; but we ought not to abuse him openly for he is one of the most dangerous scoundrels to be found in all Burgundy, and he is now in a position to injure you."

"In what way?" asked the general, sobering down.

"Gaubertin has control of nearly one third of the supplies sent to Paris. As general agent for the timber business, he orders all the work of the forests, — the felling, chopping, floating, and sending to market. Being in close relations with the workmen, he is the arbiter of prices. It has taken him three years to create this position, but he holds it now like a fortress. He is essential to all dealers, never favoring one more than another; he regulates the whole business in their interests, and their affairs are better and more cheaply looked after by him than they were in the old time by separate agents for each firm. For instance, he has so completely put a stop to competition that he has absolute control of the auction sales; the crown and the State are both dependent on him. Their timber is sold under the hammer and falls invariably to Gaubertin's dealers; in fact, no others attempt now to bid against them. Last year Monsieur Mariotte, of Auxerre, urged by the commissioner of domains, did attempt to compete with Gaubertin. At first, Gaubertin let him buy the standing wood at the usual prices; but when it came to cutting it, the Avonnais workmen asked such enormous prices that Monsieur Mariotte was obliged to bring laborers from Auxerre, whom the Ville-aux-Fayes workmen attacked and drove away. The head of the coalition, and the ringleader of the brawl were brought before the police court, and the suits cost

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Monsieur Mariotte a great deal of money; for, besides the odium of having convicted and punished poor men, he was forced to pay all costs, because the losing side had not a farthing to do it with. A suit against laboring men is sure to result in hatred to those who live among them. Let me warn you of this; for if you follow the course you propose, you will have to fight against the poor of this district at least. But that's not all. Counting it over, Monsieur Mariotte, a worthy man, found he was the loser by his original lease. Forced to pay ready money, he was nevertheless obliged to sell on time; Gaubertin delivered his timber at long credits for the purpose of ruining his competitor. He undersold him by at least five per cent, and the end of it is that poor Mariotte's credit is badly shaken. Gaubertin is now pressing and harassing the poor man so that he is driven, they tell me, to leave not only Auxerre, but even Burgundy itself; and he is right. In this way land-owners have long been sacrificed to dealers who now set the market-prices, just as the furniture-dealers in Paris dictate values to appraisers. But Gaubertin saves the owners so much trouble and worry that they are really gainers."

"How so?" asked the general.

"In the first place, because the less complicated a business is, the greater the profits to the owners," answered Sibilet. "Besides which, their income is more secure; and in all matters of rural improvement and development that is the main thing, as you will find out. Then, too, Monsieur Gaubertin is the friend and patron of working-men; he pays them well and keeps them always at work; therefore, though their families live on the estates, the woods leased to dealers and belong-

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ing to the land-owners who trust the care of their property to Gaubertin (such as MM. de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles) are not devastated. The dead wood is gathered up, but that is all — "

"That rascal Gaubertin has lost no time!" cried the general.

"He is a bold man," said Sibilet. "He really is, as he calls himself, the steward of the best half of the department, instead of being merely the steward of Les Aigues. He makes a little out of everybody, and that little on every two millions brings him in forty to fifty thousand francs a year. He says himself, 'The fires on the Parisian hearths pay it all.' He is your enemy, Monsieur le comte. My advice to you is to capitulate and be reconciled with him. He is intimate, as you know, with Soudry, the head of the gendarmerie at Soulanges; with Monsieur Rigou, our mayor at Blangy; the patrols are under his influence; therefore you will find it impossible to repress the pilferings which are eating into your estate. During the last two years your woods have been devastated. Consequently the Gravelots are more than likely to win their suit. They say, very truly: 'According to the terms of the lease, the care of the woods is left to the owner; he does not protect them, and we are injured; the owner is bound to pay us damages.' That's fair enough; but it does'nt follow that they should win their case."

"We must be ready to defend this suit at all costs," said the general, "and then we shall have no more of them."

"You will gratify Gaubertin," remarked Sibilet.

"How so?"

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"Suing the Gravelots is the same as a hand to hand fight with Gaubertin, who is their agent," answered Sibilet. "He asks nothing better than such a suit. He declares, so I hear, that he will bring you if necessary before the Court of Appeals."

"The rascal! the —"

"If you attempt to work your own woods," continued Sibilet, turning the knife in the wound, "you will find yourself at the mercy of workmen who will force you to pay rich men's prices instead of market-prices. In short, they 'll put you, as they did that poor Mariotte, in a position where you must sell at a loss. If you then try to lease the woods you will get no tenants, for you cannot expect that any one should take risks for himself which Mariotte only took for the crown and the State. Suppose a man talks of his losses to the government! The government is a gentleman who is, like your obedient servant when he was in its employ, a worthy man with a frayed overcoat, who reads the newspapers at a desk. Let his salary be twelve hundred or twelve thousand francs, his disposition is the same, it is not a whit softer. Talk of reductions and releases from the public treasury represented by the said gentleman! He 'll only pooh-pooh you as he mends his pen. No, the law is the wrong road for you, Monsieur le comte."

"Then what 's to be done?" cried the general, his blood boiling as he tramped up and down before the bench.

"Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, abruptly, "what I say to you is not for my own interests, certainly; but I advise you to sell Les Aigues and leave the neighborhood."

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On hearing these words the general sprang back as if a cannon-ball had struck him; then he looked at Sibilet with a shrewd, diplomatic eye.

"A general of the Imperial Guard running away from the rascals, when Madame la comtesse likes Les Aigues!" he said. "No, I'll sooner box Gaubertin's ears on the market-place of Ville-aux-Fayes, and force him to fight me that I may shoot him like a dog."

"Monsieur le comte, Gaubertin is not such a fool as to let himself be brought into collision with you. Besides, you could not openly insult the mayor of so important a place as Ville-aux-Fayes."

"I'll have him turned out; the Troisvilles can do that for me; it is a question of income."

"You won't succeed, Monsieur le comte; Gaubertin's arms are long; you will get yourself into difficulties from which you cannot escape."

"Let us think of the present," interrupted the general. "About that suit?"

"That, Monsieur le comte, I can manage to win for you," replied Sibilet, with a knowing glance.

"Bravo, Sibilet!" said the general, shaking his steward's hand; "how are you going to do it?"

"You will win it on a writ of error," replied Sibilet. "In my opinion the Gravelots have the right of it. But it is not enough to be in the right, they must also be in order as to legal forms, and that they have neglected. The Gravelots ought to have summoned you to have the woods better watched. They can't ask for indemnity, at the close of a lease, for damages which they know have been going on for nine years; there is a clause in the lease as to this, on which we can file a bill of exceptions. You will lose the suit at Ville-aux-

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Fayes, possibly in the upper court as well, but we will carry it to Paris and you will win at the Court of Appeals. The costs will be heavy and the expenses ruinous. You will have to spend from twelve to fifteen thousand francs merely to win the suit, — but you will win it, if you care to. The suit will only increase the enmity of the Gravelots, for the expenses will be even heavier on them. You will be their bugbear; you will be called litigious and calumniated in every way; still, you can win — "

"Then, what 's to be done?" repeated the general, on whom Sibilet's arguments were beginning to produce the effect of a violent poison.

Just then the remembrance of the blows he had given Gaubertin with his cane crossed his mind, and made him wish he had bestowed them on himself. His flushed face was enough to show Sibilet the irritation that he felt.

"You ask me what can be done, Monsieur le comte? Why, only one thing, compromise; but of course you can't negotiate that yourself. I must be thought to cheat you! We, poor devils, whose only fortune and comfort is in our good name, it is hard on us to even seem to do a questionable thing. We are always judged by appearances. Gaubertin himself saved Mademoiselle Laguerre's life during the Revolution, but it seemed to others that he was robbing her. She rewarded him in her will with a diamond worth ten thousand francs, which Madame Gaubertin now wears on her head."

The general gave Sibilet another glance still more diplomatic than the first; but the steward seemed to take no notice of the challenge it expressed.

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"If I were to appear dishonest, Monsieur Gaubertin would be so overjoyed that I could instantly obtain his help," continued Sibilet. "He would listen with all his ears if I said to him: 'Suppose I were to extort twenty thousand francs from Monsieur le comte for Messrs. Gravelot, on condition that they shared them with me?' If your adversaries consented to that, Monsieur le comte, I should return you ten thousand francs; you lose only the other ten, you save appearances, and the suit is quashed."

"You are a fine fellow, Sibilet," said the general, taking his hand and shaking it. "If you can manage the future as well as you do the present, I'll call you the prince of stewards."

"As to the future," said Sibilet, "you won't die of hunger if no timber is cut for two or three years. Let us begin by putting proper keepers in the woods. Between now and then things will flow as the water does in the Avonne. Gaubertin may die, or get rich enough to retire from business; at any rate, you will have sufficient time to find him a competitor. The cake is too rich not to be shared. Look for another Gaubertin to oppose the original."

"Sibilet," said the old soldier, delighted with this variety of solutions. "I'll give you three thousand francs if you'll settle the matter as you propose. For the rest, we'll think about it."

"Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, "first and foremost have the forest properly watched. See for yourself the condition in which the peasantry have put it during your two years' absence. What could I do? I am steward; I am not a bailiff. To guard Les Aignes properly you need a mounted patrol and three keepers."

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"I certainly shall have the estate properly guarded. So it is to be war, is it? Very good, then we will make war. That does n't frighten me," said Montcornet, rubbing his hands.

"A war of francs," said Sibilet; "and you may find that more difficult than the other kind; men can be killed but you can't kill self-interest. You will fight your enemy on the battlefield where all landlords are compelled to fight, — I mean cash results. It is not enough to produce, you must sell; and in order to sell, you must be on good terms with everybody."

"I shall have the country people on my side."

"By what means?"

"By doing good among them."

"Doing good to the valley peasants! to the petty shopkeepers of Soulanges!" exclaimed Sibilet, squinting horribly, by reason of the irony which flamed brighter in one eye than in the other. "Monsieur le comte does n't know what he undertakes. Our Lord Jesus Christ would die again upon the cross in this valley! If you wish an easy life, follow the example of the late Mademoiselle Laguerre; let yourself be robbed, or else make people afraid of you. Women, children, and the masses are all governed by fear. That was the great secret of the Convention, and of the Emperor, too."

"Good heavens! is this the forest of Bondy?" cried the general.

"My dear," said Sibilet's wife, appearing at this moment, "your breakfast is ready. Pray excuse him, Monsieur le comte; he has eaten nothing since morning for he was obliged to go to Ronquerolles to deliver some barley."

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"Go, go, Sibilet," said the general.

The next morning the count rose early, before daylight, and went to the gate of the Avonne, intending to talk with the one forester whom he employed and find out what the man's sentiments really were.

Some seven or eight hundred acres of the forest of Les Aigues lie along the banks of the Avonne; and to preserve the majestic beauty of the river the large trees that border it have been left untouched for a distance of three leagues on both sides in an almost straight line. The mistress of Henry IV., to whom Les Aigues formerly belonged, was as fond of hunting as the king himself. In 1593 she ordered a bridge to be built of a single arch with shelving roadway by which to ride from the lower side of the forest to a much larger portion of it, purchased by her, which lay upon the slopes of the hills. The gate of the Avonne was built as place of meeting for the huntsmen; and we know the magnificence bestowed by the architects of that day upon all buildings intended for the delight of the crown and the nobility. Six avenues branched away from it, their place of meeting forming a half-moon. In the centre of the semi-circular space stood an obelisk surmounted by a round shield, formerly gilded, bearing on one side the arms of Navarre and on the other those of the Countess de Moret. Another half-moon, on the side toward the river, communicated with the first by a straight avenue, at the opposite end of which the steep rise of the Venetian-shaped bridge could be seen. Between two elegant iron railings of the same character as that of the magnificent railing which formerly surrounded the garden of the Place Royale in Paris, now so unfortunately destroyed, stood a brick pavilion, with

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stone courses hewn in facets like those of the château, with a very pointed roof and window-casings of stone cut in the same manner. This old style, which gave the building a regal air, is suitable only to prisons when used in cities; but standing in the heart of forests it derives from its surroundings a splendor of its own. A group of trees formed a screen, behind which the kennels, an old falconry, a pheasantry, and the quarters of the huntsmen were falling into ruins, after being in their day the wonder and admiration of Burgundy.

In 1595, the royal hunting-parties set forth from this magnificent pavilion, preceded by those fine dogs so dear to Rubens and to Paul Veronese; the huntsmen mounted on high-stepping steeds with stout and blue-white satiny haunches, seen no longer except in Wouverman's amazing work, followed by footmen in livery; the scene enlivened by whippers-in, wearing the high top-boots with facings and the yellow leathern breeches which have come down to the present day on the canvas of Van der Meulen. The obelisk was erected in commemoration of the visit of the Béarnais, and his hunt with the beautiful Comtesse de Moret; the date is given below the arms of Navarre. That jealous woman, whose son was afterwards legitimatized, would not allow the arms of France to figure on the obelisk, regarding them as a rebuke.

At the time of which we write, when the general's eyes rested on this splendid ruin, moss had gathered for centuries on the four faces of the roof; the hewn-stone courses, mangled by time, seemed to cry with yawning mouths against the profanation; disjointed leaden settings let fall their octagonal panes, so that the windows seemed blind of an eye here and there. Yel-

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low wallflowers bloomed about the copings; ivy slid its white rootlets into every crevice.

All things bespoke a shameful want of care, — the seal set by mere life-possessors on the ancient glories that they possess. Two windows on the first floor were stuffed with hay. Through another, on the ground-floor, was seen a room filled with tools and logs of wood; while a cow pushed her muzzle through a fourth, proving that Courtecuisse, to avoid having to walk from the pavilion to the pheasantry, had turned the large hall of the building into a stable, — a hall with panelled ceiling, and in the centre of each panel the arms of all the various possessors of Les Aigues!

Black and dirty palings disgraced the approach to the pavilion, making square inclosures with plank roofs for pigs, ducks, and hens, the manure of which was taken away every six months. A few ragged garments were hung to dry on the brambles which boldly grew unchecked here and there. As the general came along the avenue from the bridge, Madame Courtecuisse was scouring a saucepan in which she had just made her coffee. The forester, sitting on a chair in the sun, considered his wife as a savage considers his. When he heard a horse's hoofs he turned round, saw the count, and seemed taken aback.

"Well, Courtecuisse, my man," said the general, "I 'm not surprised that the peasants cut my woods before Messrs. Gravelot can do so. So you consider your place a sinecure?"

"Indeed, Monsieur le comte, I have watched the woods so many nights that I 'm ill from it. I 've got a chill, and I suffer such pain this morning that my wife has just made me a poultice in that saucepan."

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"My good fellow," said the count, "I don't know any pain that a coffee poultice cures except that of hunger. Listen to me, you rascal! I rode through my forest yesterday, and then through those of Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Ronquerolles. Theirs are carefully watched and preserved, while mine is in a shameful state."

"Ah, monsieur! but they are the old lords of the neighborhood; everybody respects their property. How can you expect me to fight against six districts? I care for my life more than for your woods. A man who would undertake to watch your woods as they ought to be watched would get a ball in his head for wages in some dark corner of the forest —"

"Coward!" cried the general, trying to control the anger the man's insolent reply provoked in him. "Last night was as clear as day, yet it cost me three hundred francs in actual robbery and over a thousand in future damages. You will leave my service unless you do better. All wrong-doing deserves some mercy; therefore these are my conditions: You may have the fines, and I will pay you three francs for every indictment you bring against these depredators. If I don't get what I expect, you know what you have to expect, and no pension either. Whereas, if you serve me faithfully and contrive to stop these depredat'ons, I 'll give you an annuity of three hundred francs for life. You can think it over. Here are six ways," continued the count, pointing to the branching roads; "there 's only one for you to take, — as for me also, who am not afraid of balls; try and find the right one."

Courtecuisse, a small man about forty-six years of age, with a full-moon face, found his greatest happiness

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in doing nothing. He expected to live and die in that pavilion, now considered by him *his* pavilion. His two cows were pastured in the forest, from which he got his wood; and he spent his time in looking after his garden instead of after the delinquents. Such neglect of duty suited Gaubertin, and Courtecuisse knew it did. The keeper chased only those depredators who were the objects of his personal dislike, — young women who would not yield to his wishes, or persons against whom he had a grudge; though for some time past he had really felt no dislikes, for every one yielded to him on account of his easy-going ways with them.

Courtecuisse had a place always kept for him at the table of the Grand-I-Vert; the wood-pickers feared him no longer; indeed, his wife and he received many gifts in kind from them; his wood was brought in; his vineyard dug; in short, all delinquents at whom he blinked did him service.

Counting on Gaubertin for the future, and feeling sure of two acres of land whenever Les Aigues should be brought to the hammer, he was roughly awakened by the curt speech of the general, who, after four quiescent years, was now revealing his true character, — that of a bourgeois rich man who was determined to be no longer deceived. Courtecuisse took his cap, his game-bag, and his gun, put on his gaiters and his belt (which bore the very recent arms of Montcornet), and started for Ville-aux-Fayes, with the careless, indifferent air and manner under which country-people often conceal very deep reflections, while he gazed at the woods and whistled to the dogs to follow him.

"What! you complain of the Shopman when he proposes to make your fortune?" said Gaubertin. "Does n't



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the fool offer to give you three francs for every arrest you make, and the fines to boot? Have an understanding with your friends and you can bring as many indictments as you please, — hundreds if you like! With one thousand francs you can buy La Bâchelerie from Rigou, become a property owner, live in your own house, and work for yourself, or rather, make others work for you, and take your ease. Only — now listen to me — you must manage to arrest only such as have n't a penny in the world. You can't shear sheep unless the wool is on their backs. Take the Shopman's offer and leave him to collect the costs, — if he wants them; tastes differ. Did n't old Mariotte prefer losses to profits, in spite of my advice?"

Courtecuisse, filled with admiration for these words of wisdom, returned home burning with the desire to be a land-owner and a bourgeois like the rest.

When the general reached Les Aigues he related his expedition to Sibilet.

"Monsieur le comte did very right," said the steward, rubbing his hands; "but he must not stop short half-way. The field-keeper of the district who allows the country-people to prey upon the meadows and rob the harvests ought to be changed. Monsieur le comte should have himself chosen mayor, and appoint one of his old soldiers, who would have the courage to carry out his orders, in place of Vaudoyer. A great land-owner should be master in his own district. Just see what difficulties we have with the present mayor!"

The mayor of the district of Blangy, formerly a Benedictine, named Rigou, had married, in the first year of the Republic, the servant-woman of the late priest of Blangy. In spite of the repugnance which a

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married monk excited at the Prefecture, he had continued to be mayor after 1815, for the reason that there was no one else at Blangy who was capable of filling the post. But in 1817, when the bishop sent the Abbé Brossette to the parish of Blangy (which had then been vacant over twenty-five years), a violent opposition not unnaturally broke out between the old apostate and the young ecclesiastic, whose character is already known to us. The war which was then and there declared between the mayor's office and the parsonage increased the popularity of the magistrate, who had hitherto been more or less despised. Rigou, whom the peasants had disliked for usurious dealings, now suddenly represented their political and financial interests, supposed to be threatened by the Restoration, and more especially by the clergy.

A copy of the "Constitutionnel," that great organ of liberalism, after making the rounds of the Café de la Paix, came back to Rigou on the seventh day, — the subscription, standing in the name of old Socquard the keeper of the coffee-house, being shared by twenty persons. Rigou passed the paper on to Langlumé the miller, who, in turn, gave it in shreds to any one who knew how to read. The "Paris items," and the anti-religion jokes of the liberal sheet formed the public opinion of the valley des Aigues. Rigou, like the *venerable* Abbé Grégoire, became a hero. For him, as for certain Parisian bankers, politics spread a mantle of popularity over his shameful dishonesty.

At this particular time the perjured monk, like François Keller the great orator, was looked upon as a defender of the rights of the people, — he who, not so very long before, dared not walk in the fields after

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dark, lest he should stumble into pitfalls where he would seem to have been killed by accident! Persecute a man politically and you not only magnify him, but you redeem his past and make it innocent. The liberal party was a great worker of miracles in this respect. Its dangerous journal, which had the wit to make itself as commonplace, as calumniating, as credulous, and as sillily perfidious as every audience made up of the general masses, did in all probability as much injury to private interests as it did to those of the Church.

Rigou flattered himself that he should find in a Bonapartist general now laid on the shelf, in a son of the people raised from nothing by the Revolution, a sound enemy to the Bourbons and the priests. But the general, bearing in mind his private ambitions, so arranged matters as to evade the visit of Monsieur and Madame Rigou when he first came to Les Aigues.

When you have become better acquainted with the terrible character of Rigou, the lynx of the valley, you will understand the full extent of the second capital blunder which the general's aristocratic ambitions led him to commit, and which the countess made all the greater by an offence which will be described in the further history of Rigou.

If Montcornet had courted the mayor's good-will, if he had sought his friendship, perhaps the influence of the renegade might have neutralized that of Gaubertin. Far from that, three suits were now pending in the courts of Ville-aux-Fayes between the general and the ex-monk. Until the present time the general had been so absorbed in his personal interests and in his marriage that he had never remembered Rigou:

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but when Sibilet advised him to get himself made mayor in Rigou's place, he took post-horses and went to see the prefect.

The prefect, Comte Martial de la Roche-Hugon, had been a friend of the general since 1804; and it was a word from him said to Montcornet in a conversation in Paris, which brought about the purchase of Les Aigues. Comte Martial, a prefect under Napoleon, remained a prefect under the Bourbons, and courted the bishop to retain his place. Now it happened that Monseigneur had several times requested him to get rid of Rigou. Martial, to whom the condition of the district was perfectly well known, was delighted with the general's request; so that in less than a month the Comte de Montcornet was mayor of Blangy.

By one of those accidents which come about naturally, the general met, while at the prefecture where his friend put him up, a non-commissioned officer of the ex-imperial guard, who had been cheated out of his retiring pension. The general had already, under other circumstances, done a service to the brave cavalryman, whose name was Groison; the man, remembering it, now told him his troubles, admitting that he was penniless. The general promised to get him his pension, and proposed that he should take the place of field-keeper to the district of Blangy, as a way of paying off his score of gratitude by devotion to the new mayor's interests. The appointments of master and man were made simultaneously, and the general gave, as may be supposed, very firm instructions to his subordinate.

Vaudoyer, the displaced keeper, a peasant on the Ronquerolles estate, was only fit, like most field-keepers, to stalk about, and gossip, and let himself be

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petted by the poor of the district, who asked nothing better than to corrupt that subaltern authority, — the advanced guard, as it were, of the land-owners. He knew Soudry, the brigadier at Soulanges, for brigadiers of gendarmerie, performing functions that are semi-judicial in drawing up criminal indictments, have much to do with the rural keepers, who are, in fact, their natural spies. Soudry, being appealed to, sent Vaudoyer to Gaubertin, who received his old acquaintance very cordially, and invited him to drink while listening to the recital of his troubles.

"My dear friend," said the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, who could talk to every man in his own language, "what has happened to you is likely to happen to us all. The nobles are back upon us. The men to whom the Emperor gave titles make common cause with the old nobility. They all want to crush the people, re-establish their former rights and take our property from us. But we are Burgundians; we must resist, and drive those *Arminacs* back to Paris. Return to Blangy; you shall be agent for Monsieur Polissard, the wood-merchant, who is contractor for the forest of Ronquerolles. Don't be uneasy, my lad; I'll find you enough to do for the whole of the coming year. But remember one thing; the wood is for ourselves! Not a single depredation, or the thing is at an end. Send all interlopers to Les Aigues. If there 's brush or fagots to sell make people buy ours; don't let them buy of Les Aigues. You 'll get back to your place as field-keeper before long; this thing can't last. The general will get sick of living among thieves. Did you know that that Shopman called me a thief, me! — son of the stanchest and most incorruptible of republicans; *me!* —

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the son-in-law of Mouchon, that famous representative of the people, who died without leaving enough to bury him?"

The general raised the salary of the new field-keeper to three hundred francs; and built a town-hall, in which he gave him a residence. Then he married him to a daughter of one of his tenant-farmers, who had lately died, leaving her an orphan with three acres of vineyard. Groison attached himself to the general as a dog to his master. This legitimate fidelity was admitted by the whole community. The keeper was feared and respected, but like the captain of a vessel whose ship's company hate him; the peasantry shunned him as they would a leper. Met either in silence or with sarcasms veiled under a show of good-humor, the new keeper was a sentinel watched by other sentinels. He could do nothing against such numbers. The delinquents took delight in plotting depredations which it was impossible for him to prove, and the old soldier grew furious at his helplessness. Groison found the excitement of a war of factions in his duties, and all the pleasures of the chase, — a chase after petty delinquents. Trained in real war to a loyalty which consists in part of playing a fair game, this enemy of traitors came at last to hate these people, so treacherous in their conspiracies, and so clever in their thefts that they mortified his self-esteem. He soon observed that the depredations were committed only at Les Aigues; all the other estates were respected. At first he despised a peasantry ungrateful enough to pillage a general of the Empire, an essentially kind and generous man; presently, however, he added hatred to contempt. But multiply himself as he would, he could not be everywhere, and

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the enemy pillaged everywhere that he was not. Groison made the general understand that it was necessary to organize the defence on a war footing, and proved to him the insufficiency of his own devoted efforts and the evil disposition of the inhabitants of the valley.

"There is something behind it all, general," he said; "these people are so bold they fear nothing; they seem to rely on the favor of the good God."

"We shall see," replied the count.

Fatal word! The verb *to see* has no future tense for politicians.

At the moment, Montcornet was considering another difficulty, which seemed to him more pressing. He needed an *alter ego* to do his work in the mayor's office during the months he lived in Paris. Obliged to find some man who knew how to read and write for the position of assistant mayor, he knew of none and could hear of none throughout the district but Langlumé, the tenant of his own flour-mill. The choice was disastrous. Not only were the interests of mayor and miller diametrically opposed, but Langlumé had long hatched swindling projects with Rigou, who lent him money to carry on his business, or to acquire property. The miller had bought the right to the hay of certain fields for his horses, and Sibilet could not sell it except to him. The hay of all the fields in the district was sold at better prices than that of Les Aigues, though the yield of the latter was the best.

Langlumé, then, became the provisional mayor; but in France the provisional is eternal, — though Frenchmen are suspected of loving change. Acting by Rigou's advice, he played a part of great devotion to the gen-

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eral; and he was still assistant-mayor at the moment when, by the omnipotence of the historian, this drama begins.

In the absence of the mayor, Rigou, necessarily a member of the district council, reigned supreme, and brought forward resolutions all injuriously affecting the general. At one time he caused money to be spent for purposes that were profitable to the peasants only, — the greater part of the expenses falling upon Les Aigues, which, by reason of its great extent, paid two thirds of the taxes; at other times the council refused, under his influence, certain useful and necessary allowances, such as an increase of salary for the abbé, repairs or improvements to the parsonage, or "wages" to the school-master.

"If the peasants once know how to read and write, what will become of us?" said Langlumé, naïvely, to the general, to excuse this anti-liberal action taken against a brother of the Christian Doctrine whom the Abbé Brossette wished to establish as a public school-master in Blangy.

The general, delighted with his old Groison, returned to Paris and immediately looked about him for other old soldiers of the late imperial guard, with whom to organize the defence of Les Aigues on a formidable footing. By dint of searching out and questioning his friends and many officers on half-pay, he unearthed Michaud, a former quartermaster at headquarters of the cuirassiers of the guard; one of those men whom troopers call "hard-to-cook," a nickname derived from the mess kitchen where refractory beans are not uncommon. Michaud picked out from among his friends and acquaintances, three other men fit to be his helpers,

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and able to guard the estate without fear and without reproach.

The first, named Steingel, a pure-blooded Alsacian, was a natural son of the general of that name, who fell in one of Bonaparte's first victories with the army of Italy. Tall and strong, he belonged to the class of soldiers accustomed, like the Russians, to obey, passively and absolutely. Nothing hindered him in the performance of his duty; he would have collared an emperor or the pope if such were his orders. He ignored danger. Perfectly fearless, he had never received the smallest scratch during his sixteen years' campaigning. He slept in the open air or in his bed with stoical indifference. At any increased labor or discomfort, he merely remarked, "It seems to be the order of the day."

The second man, Vatel, son of the regiment, corporal of voltigeurs, gay as a lark, rather free and easy with the fair sex, brave to foolhardiness, was capable of shooting a comrade with a laugh if ordered to execute him. With no future before him and not knowing how to employ himself, the prospect of finding an amusing little war in the functions of keeper, attracted him; and as the grand army and the Emperor had hitherto stood him in place of a religion, so now he swore to serve the brave Montcornet against and through all and everything. His nature was of that essentially wrangling quality to which a life without enemies seems dull and objectless, — the nature, in short, of a litigant, or a policeman. If it had not been for the presence of the sheriff's officer, he would have seized Tonsard and the bundle of wood at the Grand-I-Vert, snapping his fingers at the law on the inviolability of a man's domicile.

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The third man, Gaillard, also an old soldier, risen to the rank of sub-lieutenant, and covered with wounds, belonged to the class of mechanical soldiers. The fate of the Emperor never left his mind and he became indifferent to everything else. With the care of a natural daughter on his hands, he accepted the place that was now offered to him as a means of subsistence, taking it as he would have taken service in a regiment.

When the general reached Les Aigues, whither he had gone in advance of his troopers, intending to send away Courtecuisse, he was amazed at discovering the impudent audacity with which the keeper had fulfilled his commands. There is a method of obeying which makes the obedience of the servant a cutting sarcasm on the master's order. But all things in this world can be reduced to absurdity, and Courtecuisse in this instance went beyond its limits.

One hundred and twenty-six indictments against depredators (most of whom were in collusion with Courtecuisse) and sworn to before the justice court of Soulanges, had resulted in sixty-nine commitments for trial, in virtue of which Brunet, the sheriff's officer, delighted at such a windfall of fees, had rigorously enforced the warrants in such a way as to bring about what is called, in legal language, a declaration of insolvency; a condition of pauperism where the law becomes of course powerless. By this declaration the sheriff proves that the defendant possesses no property of any kind, and is therefore a pauper. Where there is absolutely nothing, the creditor, like the king, loses his right to sue. The paupers in this case, carefully selected by Courtecuisse, were scattered through five neighboring districts, whither Brunet betook himself duly attended

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by his satellites, Vermichel and Fourchon, to serve the writs. Later he transmitted the papers to Sibilet with a bill of costs for five thousand francs, requesting him to obtain the further orders of Monsieur le comte de Montcornet.

Just as Sibilet, armed with these papers, was calmly explaining to the count the result of the rash orders he had given to Courtecuisse, and witnessing, as calmly, a burst of the most violent anger a general of the French calvary was ever known to indulge in, Courtecuisse entered to pay his respects to his master and to bring his own account of eleven hundred francs, the sum to which his promised commission now amounted. The natural man took the bit in his teeth and ran off with the general, who totally forgot his coronet and his field rank; he was a trooper once more, vomiting curses of which he probably was ashamed when he thought of them later.

"Ha! eleven hundred francs!" he shouted, "eleven hundred slaps in your face! eleven hundred kicks!—Do you think I can't see through your lies? Out of my sight, or I 'll strike you flat!"

At the mere look of the general's purple face and before that warrior could get out the last words, Courtecuisse was off like a swallow.

"Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, gently, "you are wrong."

"Wrong! I, wrong?"

"Yes, Monsieur le comte, take care, you will have trouble with that rascal; he will sue you."

"What do I care for that? Tell the scoundrel to leave the place instantly! See that he takes nothing of mine, and pay him his wages."

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Four hours later the whole country-side was gossiping about this scene. The general, they said, had assaulted the unfortunate Courtecuisse, and refused to pay his wages and two thousand francs besides, which he owed him. Extraordinary stories went the rounds, and the master of Les Aigues was declared insane. The next day Brunet, who had served all the warrants for the general, now brought him on behalf of Courtecuisse a summons to appear before the police court. The lion was stung by gnats; but his misery was only just beginning.

The installation of a keeper is not done without a few formalities; he must, for instance, file an oath in the civil court. Some days therefore elapsed before the three keepers really entered upon their functions. Though the general had written to Michaud to bring his wife without waiting till the lodge at the gate of the Avonne was ready for them, the future head-keeper, or rather bailiff, was detained in Paris by his marriage and his wife's family, and did not reach Les Aigues until a fortnight later. During those two weeks, and during the time still further required for certain formalities which were carried out with very ill grace by the authorities at Ville-aux-Fayes, the forest of Les Aigues was shamefully devastated by the peasantry, who took advantage of the fact that there was practically no watch over it.

The appearance of three keepers handsomely dressed in green cloth, the Emperor's color, with faces denoting firmness, and each of them well-made, active, and capable of spending their nights in the woods, was a great event in the valley, from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes.

Throughout the district Groison was the only man

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who welcomed these veterans. Delighted to be thus reinforced, he let fall a few threats against thieves, who before long, he said, would be watched so closely that they could do no damage. Thus the usual proclamation of all great commanders was not lacking to the present war; in this case it was said aloud and also whispered in secret.

Sibilet called the general's attention to the fact that the gendarmerie of Soulanges, and especially its brigadier, Soudry, were thoroughly and hypocritically hostile to Les Aigues. He made him see the importance of substituting another brigade, which might show a better spirit.

"With a good brigadier and a company of gendarmes devoted to your interests, you could manage the country," he said to him.

The general went to the Prefecture and obtained from the general in command of the division the retirement of Soudry and the substitution of a man named Viallet, an excellent gendarme at headquarters, who was much praised by his general and the prefect. The company of gendarmes at Soulanges were dispersed to other places in the department by the colonel of the gendarmerie, an old friend of Montcornet, and chosen men were put in their places with secret orders to keep watch over the estate of the Comte de Montcornet, and prevent all future attempts to injure it; they were also particularly enjoined not to allow themselves to be gained over by the inhabitants of Soulanges.

This last revolutionary measure, carried out with such rapidity that there was no possibility of countermining it created much astonishment in Soulanges and in Ville-aux-Fayes. Soudry, who felt himself dismissed,

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complained bitterly, and Gaubertin managed to get him appointed mayor, which put the gendarmerie under his orders. An outcry was made about tyranny. Montcornet became an object of general hatred. Not only were five or six lives radically changed by him, but many personal vanities were wounded. The peasants, taking their cue from words dropped by the small tradesmen of Ville-aux-Fayes and Soulanges, and by Rigou, Langlumé, Guerbet, and the postmaster at Conches, thought they were on the eve of losing what they called their rights.

The general stopped the suit brought by Courtecuisse by paying him all he demanded. The man then purchased, nominally for two thousand francs, a little property surrounded on all sides but one by the estate of Les Aigues, — a sort of cover into which the game escaped. Rigou, the owner, had never been willing to part with La Bâchelerie, as it was called, to the possessors of the estate, but he now took malicious pleasure in selling it, at fifty per cent discount, to Courtecuisse; which made the ex-keeper one of Rigou's numerous henchmen, for all he actually paid for the property was one thousand francs.

The three keepers, with Michaud the bailiff, and Groison the field-keeper of Blangy, led henceforth the life of guerillas. Living night and day in the forest, they soon acquired that deep knowledge of woodland things which becomes a science among foresters, saving them much loss of time; they studied the tracks of animals, the species of the trees, and their habits of growth, training their ears to every sound and to every murmur of the woods. Still further, they observed faces, watched and understood the different families in

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the various villages of the district, and knew the individuals in each family, their habits, characters, and means of living, — a far more difficult matter than most persons suppose. When the peasants who obtained their living from Les Aigues saw these well-planned measures of defence, they met them with dumb resistance or sneering submission.

From the first, Michaud and Sibilet mutually disliked each other. The frank and loyal soldier, with the sense of honor of a subaltern of the young *garde*, hated the servile brutality and the discontented spirit of the steward. He soon took note of the objections with which Sibilet opposed all measures that were really judicious, and the reasons he gave for those that were questionable. Instead of calming the general, Sibilet, as the reader has already seen, constantly excited him and drove him to harsh measures, all the while trying to daunt him by drawing his attention to countless annoyances, petty vexations, and ever-recurring and unconquerable difficulties. Without suspecting the rôle of spy and exasperator undertaken by Sibilet (who secretly intended to eventually make choice in his own interests between Gaubertin and the general) Michaud felt that the steward's nature was bad and grasping, and he was unable to explain to himself its apparent honesty. The enmity which separated the two functionaries was satisfactory to the general. Michaud's hatred led him to watch the steward, though he would not have condescended to play the part of spy if the general had not required it. Sibilet fawned upon the bailiff and flattered him, without being able to get anything from him beyond an extreme politeness which the loyal soldier established between them as a barrier.

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Now, all preliminary details having been made known, the reader will understand the conduct of the general's enemies and the meaning of the conversation which he had with what he called his two ministers, after Madame de Montcornet, the abbé, and Blondet left the breakfast-table.

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## IX.

### CONCERNING THE MEDIOCRACY.

"WELL, Michaud, what's the news?" asked the general as soon as his wife had left the room.

"General, if you will permit me to say so, it would be better not to talk over matters in this room. Walls have ears, and I should like to be certain that what we say reaches none but our own."

"Very good," said the general; "then let us walk towards the steward's lodge by the path through the fields; no one can overhear us there."

A few moments later the general, with Michaud and Sibilet, was crossing the meadows, while Madame de Montcornet, with the abbé and Blondet, was on her way to the gate of the Avonne.

Michaud related the scene that had just taken place at the Grand-I-Vert.

"Vatel did wrong," said Sibilet.

"They made that plain to him at once," replied Michaud, "by blinding him; but that's nothing. General, you remember the plan we agreed upon, — to seize the cattle of those depredators against whom judgment was given? Well, we can't do it. Brunet, like his colleague Plissoud, is not loyal in his support. They both warn the delinquents when they are about to make a seizure. Vermichel, Brunet's assistant, went to the Grand-I-Vert this morning, ostensibly after Père Fourchon; and Marie Tonsard, who is intimate with

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Bonnébault, ran off at once to give the alarm at Conches. The depredations have begnn again."

"A strong show of authority is becoming daily more and more necessary," said Sibilet.

"What did I tell you?" cried the general. "We must demand the enforcement of the judgment of the court, which carried with it imprisonment; we must arrest for debt all those who do not pay the damages I have won and the costs of the suits."

"These fellows imagine the law is powerless, and tell each other that you dare not arrest them," said Sibilet. "They think they frighten you! They have confederates at Ville-aux-Fayes; for even the prosecuting attorney seems to have ignored the verdicts against them."

"I think," said Michaud, seeing that the general looked thoughtful, "that if you are willing to spend a good deal of money you can still protect the property."

"It is better to spend money than to act harshly," remarked Sibilet.

"What is your plan?" asked the general of his bailiff.

"It is very simple," said Michaud. "Inclose the whole forest with walls, like those of the park, and you will be safe; the slightest depredation then becomes a criminal offence and is taken to the assizes."

"At a franc and a half the square foot for the material only, Monsieur le comte would find his wall would cost him a third of the whole value of Les Aigues," said Sibilet, with a laugh.

"Well, well," said Montcornet, "I shall go and see the attorney-general at once."

"The attorney-general," remarked Sibilet, gently,

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" may perhaps share the opinion of his subordinate; for the negligence shown by the latter is probably the result of an agreement between them."

" Then I wish to know it!" cried Montcornet. " If I have to get the whole of them turned out, judges, civil authorities, and the attorney-general to boot, I 'll do it; I 'll go to the Keeper of the Seals, or to the king himself."

At a vehement sign made by Michaud the general stopped short and said to Sibilet, as he turned to retrace his steps, " Good day, my dear fellow," — words which the steward understood.

" Does Monsieur le comte intend, as mayor, to enforce the necessary measures to repress the abuse of gleaning?" he said, respectfully. " The harvest is coming on, and if we are to publish the statutes about certificates of pauperism and the prevention of paupers from other districts gleaning on our land, there is no time to be lost."

" Do it at once, and arrange with Groison," said the count. " With such a class of people," he added, " we must follow out the law."

So, without a moment's reflection, Montcornet gave in to a measure that Sibilet had been proposing to him for more than a fortnight, to which he had hitherto refused to consent; but now, in the violence of his anger caused by Vatel's mishap, he instantly adopted it as the right thing to do.

When Sibilet was at some distance the general said in a low voice to his bailiff: —

" Well, my dear Michaud, what is it; why did you make me that sign?"

" You have an enemy within the walls, general, yet

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you tell him plans which you ought not to confide even to the secret police."

"I share your suspicions, my dear friend," replied Montcornet, "but I don't intend to commit the same fault twice over. I shall not part with another steward till I 'm sure of a better. I am waiting to get rid of Sibilet, till you understand the business of steward well enough to take his place, and till Vatel is fit to succeed you. And yet, I have no ground of complaint against Sibilet. He is honest and punctual in all his dealings; he has n't kept back a hundred francs in all these five years. He has a perfectly detestable nature, and that's all one can say against him. If it were otherwise, what would be his plan in acting as he does?"

"General," said Michaud, gravely, "I will find out, for undoubtedly he has one; and if you would only allow it, a good bribe to that old scoundrel Fourchon will enable me to get at the truth; though after what he said just now I suspect the old fellow of having more secrets than one in his pouch. That swindling old cordwainer told me himself they want to drive you from Les Aigues. And let me tell you, for you ought to know it, that from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes there is not a peasant, a petty tradesman, a farmer, a tavern-keeper who is n't laying by his money to buy a bit of the estate. Fourchon confided to me that Tonsard has already put in his claim. The idea that you can be forced to sell Les Aigues has gone from end to end of the valley like an infection in the air. It may be that the steward's present house, with some adjoining land, will be the price paid for Sibilet's spying. Nothing is ever said among us that is not immediately known at Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet is a relative of your enemy

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Gaubertin. What you have just said about the attorney-general and the others will probably be reported before you have reached the Prefecture. You don't know what the inhabitants of this district are."

"Don't I know them? I know they are the scum of the earth! Do you suppose I am going to yield to such blackguards?" cried the general. "Good heavens, I'd rather burn Les Aigues myself!"

"No need to burn it; let us adopt a line of conduct which will baffle the schemes of these Lilliputians. Judging by threats, general, they are resolved on war to the knife against you; and therefore since you mention incendiarism, let me beg of you to insure all your buildings and all your farmhouses."

"Michaud, do you know whom they mean by 'Shopman'? Yesterday, as I was riding along by the Thune, I heard some little rascals cry out, 'The Shopman! here's the Shopman!' and then they ran away."

"Ask Sibilet; the answer is in his line, he likes to make you angry," said Michaud, with a pained look. "But — if you will have an answer — well, that's a nickname these brigands have given you, general."

"What does it mean?"

"It means, general — well, it refers to your father."

"Ha! the curs!" cried the count, turning livid. "Yes, Michaud, my father was a shopkeeper, an upholsterer; the countess doesn't know it. Oh! that I should ever — well! after all, I have waltzed with queens and empresses. I'll tell her this very night," he cried, after a pause.

"They also call you a coward," continued Michaud.

"Ha!"

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"They ask how you managed to save yourself at Essling when nearly all your comrades perished."

The accusation brought a smile to the general's lips. "Michaud, I shall go at once to the Prefecture!" he cried, with a sort of fury, "if it is only to get the policies of insurance you ask for. Let Madame la comtesse know that I have gone. Ha, ha! they want war, do they? Well, they shall have it; I'll take my pleasure in thwarting them, — every one of them, those bourgeois of Soulanges and their peasantry! We are in the enemy's country, therefore prudence! Tell the foresters to keep within the limits of the law. Poor Vatel, take care of him. The countess is inclined to be timid; she must know nothing of all this; otherwise I could never get her to come back here."

Neither the general nor Michaud understood their real peril. Michaud had been too short a time in this Burgundian valley to realize the enemy's power, though he saw its action. The general, for his part, believed in the supremacy of the law.

The law, such as the legislature of these days manufactures it, has not the virtue we attribute to it. It strikes unequally; it is so modified in many of its modes of application that it virtually refutes its own principles. This fact may be noted more or less distinctly throughout all ages. Is there any historian ignorant enough to assert that the decrees of the most vigilant of all powers were ever enforced throughout France? — for instance, that the requisitions of the Convention for men, commodities, and money were obeyed in Provence, in the depths of Normandy, on the borders of Brittany, as they were at the great centres of social life? What philosopher dares deny that a head

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falls to-day in such or such department, while in a neighboring department another head stays on its shoulders though guilty of a crime identically the same, and often more horrible? We ask for equality in life, and inequality reigns in law and in the death penalty!

When the population of a town falls below a certain figure the administrative system is no longer the same. There are perhaps a hundred cities in France where the laws are vigorously enforced, and there the intelligence of the citizens rises to the conception of the problem of public welfare and future security which the law seeks to solve; but throughout the rest of France nothing is comprehended beyond immediate gratification; people rebel against all that lessens it. Therefore in nearly one half of France we find a power of inertia which defeats all legal action, both municipal and governmental. This resistance, be it understood, does not affect the essential things of public polity. The collection of taxes, recruiting, punishment of great crimes, as a general thing do systematically go on; but outside of such recognized necessities, all legislative decrees which affect customs, morals, private interests, and certain abuses, are a dead letter, owing to the sullen opposition of the people. At the very moment when this book is going through the press, this dumb resistance, which opposed Louis XIV. in Brittany, may still be seen and felt. See the unfortunate results of the game-laws, to which we are now sacrificing yearly the lives of some twenty or thirty men for the sake of preserving a few animals.

In France the law is, to at least twenty million of inhabitants, nothing more than a bit of white paper posted on the doors of the church and the town-hall.

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That gives rise to the term "papers," which Mouche used to express legality. Many mayors of cantons (not to speak of the district mayors) put up their bundles of seeds and herbs with the printed statutes. As for the district mayors, the number of those who do not know how to read and write is really alarming, and the manner in which the civil records are kept is even more so. The danger of this state of things, well-known to the governing powers, is doubtless diminishing; but what centralization (against which every one declaims, as it is the fashion in France to declaim against all things good and useful and strong), — what centralization cannot touch, the Power against which it will forever fling itself in vain, is that which the general was now about to attack, and which we shall take leave to call the Mediocracy.

A great outcry was made against the tyranny of the nobles; in these days the cry is against that of capitalists, against abuses of power, which may be merely the inevitable galling of the social yoke, called Compact by Rousseau, Constitution by some, Charter by others; Czar here, King there, Parliament in Great Britain; while in France the general levelling begun in 1789 and continued in 1830 has paved the way for the juggling dominion of the middle classes, and delivered the nation into their hands without escape. The portrayal of one fact alone, unfortunately only too common in these days, namely, the subjection of a canton, a little town, a sub-prefecture, to the will of a family clique, — in short, the power acquired by Gaubertin, — will show this social danger better than all dogmatic statements put together. Many oppressed communities will recognize the truth of this picture; many persons secretly and silently crushed by this tyranny will find in these

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words an obituary, as it were, which may half console them for their hidden woes.

At the very moment when the general imagined himself to be renewing a warfare in which there had really been no truce, his former steward had just completed the last meshes of the net-work in which he now held the whole arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. To avoid too many explanations it is necessary to state, once for all, succinctly, the genealogical ramifications by means of which Gaubertin wound himself about the country, as a boa-constrictor winds around a tree, — with such art that a passing traveller thinks he beholds some natural effect of the tropical vegetation.

In 1793 there were three brothers of the name of Mouchon in the valley of the Avonne. After 1793 they changed the name of the valley to that of the Valley des Aigues, out of hatred to the old nobility.

The eldest brother, steward of the property of the Ronquerolles family, was elected deputy of the department to the Convention. Like his friend, Gaubertin's father, the prosecutor of those days, who saved the Soulanges family, he saved the property and the lives of the Ronquerolles. He had two daughters; one married to Gendrin, the lawyer, the other to Gaubertin. He died in 1804.

The second, through the influence of his elder brother, was made postmaster at Conches. His only child was a daughter, married to a rich farmer named Guerbet. He died in 1817.

The last of the Mouchons, who was a priest, and the curate of Ville-aux-Fayes before the Revolution, was again a priest after the re-establishment of Catholic worship, and again the curate of the same little town.

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He was not willing to take the oath, and was hidden for a long time in the hermitage of Les Aigues, under the protection of the Gaubertins, father and son. Now about sixty-seven years of age, he was treated with universal respect and affection, owing to the harmony of his nature with that of the inhabitants. Parsimonious to the verge of avarice, he was thought to be rich, and the credit of being so increased the respect that was shown to him. Monseigneur the bishop paid the greatest attention to the Abbé Mouchon, who was always spoken of as the venerable curate of Ville-aux-Fayes; and the fact that he had several times refused to go and live in a splendid parsonage attached to the Prefecture, where Monseigneur wished to settle him, made him dearer still to his people.

Gaubertin, now mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, received steady support from his brother-in-law Gendrin, who was judge of the municipal court. Gaubertin the younger, the solicitor who had the most practice before this court and much repute in the arrondissement, was already thinking of selling his practice after five years' exercise of it. He wanted to succeed his Uncle Gendrin as counsellor whenever the latter should retire from the profession. Gendrin's only son was commissioner of mortgages.

Soudry's son, who for the last two years had been prosecuting-attorney at the prefecture, was Gaubertin's henchman. The clever Madame Soudry had secured the future of her husband's son by marrying him to Rigou's only daughter. The united fortunes of the Soudrys and the ex-monk, which would come eventually to the attorney, made that young man one of the most important personages of the department.

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The sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, nephew of the general-secretary of one of the most important ministries in Paris, was the prospective husband of Mademoiselle Élise Gaubertin, the mayor's youngest daughter, whose dowry, like that of her elder sister, was two hundred thousand francs, not to speak of "expectations." This functionary showed much sense, though not aware of it, in falling in love with Mademoiselle Élise when he first arrived at Ville-aux-Fayes, in 1819. If it had not been for his social position, which made him "eligible," he would long ago have been forced to ask for his exchange. But Gaubertin in marrying him to his daughter thought much more of the uncle, the general-secretary, than of the nephew; and in return, the uncle, for the sake of his nephew, gave all his influence to Gaubertin.

Thus the Church, the magistracy both removable and irremovable, the municipality, and the prefecture, the four feet of power, walked as the mayor pleased. Let us now see how that functionary strengthened himself in the spheres above and below that in which he worked.

The department to which Ville-aux-Fayes belongs is one the number of whose population gives it the right to elect six deputies. Ever since the creation of the Left Centre of the Chamber, the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes had sent a deputy named Leclercq, formerly banking agent of the wine department of the custom-house, a son-in-law of Gaubertin, and now a governor of the Bank of France. The number of electors which this rich valley sent to the electoral college was sufficient to insure, if only through private dealing, the constant appointment of Monsieur de Ronquerolles, the

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patron of the Mouchon family. The voters of Ville-aux-Fayes lent their support to the prefect, on condition that the Marquis de Ronquerolles was maintained in the college. Thus Gaubertin, who was the first to broach the idea of this arrangement, was favorably received at the Prefecture, which he often, in return, saved from petty annoyances. The prefect always selected three firm ministerialists, and two deputies of the Left Centre. The latter, one of them being the Marquis de Ronquerolles, brother-in-law of the Comte de Sérisy, and the other a governor of the Bank of France, gave little or no alarm to the cabinet, and the elections in this department were rated excellent at the ministry of the interior.

The Comte de Soulanges, peer of France, selected to be the next marshal, and faithful to the Bourbons, knew that his forests and other property were all well-managed by the notary Lupin, and well-watched by Soudry. He was a patron of Gendrin's, having obtained his appointment as judge partly by the help of Monsieur de Ronquerolles.

Messieurs Leclercq and de Ronquerolles sat in the Left Centre, but nearer to the left than to the centre, — a political position which offers great advantages to those who regard their political conscience as a garment.

The brother of Monsieur Leclercq had obtained the situation of collector at Ville-aux-Fayes, and Leclercq himself, Gaubertin's son-in-law, had lately bought a fine estate beyond the valley of the Avonne, which brought him in a rental of thirty thousand francs, with park and château and a controlling influence in its own canton.

Thus, in the upper regions of the State, in both Chambers, and in the chief ministerial department, Gaubertin

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could rely on an influence that was powerful and also active, and which he was careful not to weary with unimportant requests.

The counsellor Gendrin, appointed judge by the Chamber, was the leading spirit of the Supreme Court; for the chief justice, one of the three ministerial deputies, left the management of it to Gendrin during half the year. The counsel for the Prefecture, a cousin of Sarcus, called "Sarcus the rich," was the right-hand man of the prefect, himself a deputy. Even without the family reasons which allied Gaubertin and young des Lupeaulx, a brother of Madame Sarcus would still have been desirable as sub-prefect to the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. Madame Sarcus, the counsellor's wife, was a Vallat of Soulanges, a family connected with the Gaubertins, and she was said to have "distinguished" the notary Lupin in her youth. Though she was now forty-five years old, with a son in the school of engineers, Lupin never went to the Prefecture without paying his respects and dining with her.

The nephew of Guerbet, the postmaster, whose father was, as we have seen, collector of Soulanges, held the important situation of examining judge in the municipal court of Ville-aux-Fayes. The third judge, son of Corbinet, the notary, belonged body and soul to the all-powerful mayor; and, finally, young Vigor, son of the lieutenant of the gendarmerie, was the substitute judge.

Sibilet's father, sheriff of the court, had married his sister to Monsieur Vigor the lieutenant, and that individual, father of six children, was cousin of the father of Gaubertin through his wife, a Gaubertin-Vallat. Eighteen months previously the united efforts of the

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two deputies, Monsieur de Soulanges and Gaubertin, had created the place of commissary of police for the sheriff's second son.

Sibilet's eldest daughter married Monsieur Hervé, a school-master, whose school was transformed into a college as a result of this marriage, so that for the past year Soulanges had rejoiced in the presence of a professor.

The sheriff's youngest son was employed on the government domains, with the promise of succeeding the clerk of registrations so soon as that officer had completed the term of service which enabled him to retire on a pension.

The youngest Sibilet girl, now sixteen years old, was betrothed to Corbinet, brother of the notary. And an old maid, Mademoiselle Gaubertin-Vallat, sister of Madame Sibilet, the sheriff's wife, held the office for the sale of stamped paper.

Thus, wherever we turn in Ville-aux-Fayes we meet some member of the invisible coalition, whose avowed chief, recognized as such by every one, great and small, was the mayor of the town, the general agent for the entire timber business, Gaubertin!

If we turn to the other end of the valley of the Avonne we shall see that Gaubertin ruled at Soulanges through the Soudrys, through Lupin the assistant mayor and steward of the Soulanges estate, who was necessarily in constant communication with the Comte de Soulanges, through Sarcus, justice of the peace, through Guerbet, the collector, through Gourdin, the doctor, who had married a Gendrin-Vatebled. He governed Blangy through Rigou, Conches through the post-master, the despotic ruler of his own district.

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Gaubertin's influence was so great and powerful that even the investments and the savings of Rigou, Soudry, Gendrin, Guerbet, Lupin, even Sarcus the rich himself, were managed by his advice. The town of Ville-aux-Fayes believed implicitly in its mayor. Gaubertin's ability was not less extolled than his honesty and his kindness; he was the servant of his relatives and constituents (always with an eye to a return of benefits), and the whole municipality adored him. The town never ceased to blame Monsieur Mariotte, of Auxerre, for having opposed and thwarted that worthy Monsieur Gaubertin.

Not aware of their strength, no occasion for displaying it having arisen, the bourgeoisie of Ville-aux-Fayes contented themselves with boasting that no strangers intermeddled in their affairs, and they believed themselves excellent citizens and faithful public servants. Nothing, however, escaped their despotic rule, which in itself was not perceived, the result being considered a triumph of the locality.

The only stranger in this family community was the government engineer in the highway department; and his dismissal in favor of the son of Sarcus the rich was now being pressed, with a fair chance that this one weak thread in the net would soon be strengthened. And yet this powerful league, which monopolized all duties both public and private, sucked the resources of the region, and fastened on power like limpets to a ship, escaped all notice so completely that General Montcornet had no suspicion of it. The prefect boasted of the prosperity of Ville-aux-Fayes and its arrondissement; even the minister of the interior was heard to remark: "There's a model sub-prefecture, which runs

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on wheels; we should be lucky indeed if all were like it." Family designs were so involved with local interests that here, as in many other little towns and even prefectures, a functionary who did not belong to the place would have been forced to resign within a year.

When this despotic middle-class cousinry seizes a victim, he is so carefully gagged and bound that complaint is impossible; he is smeared with slime and wax like a snail in a beehive. This invisible, imperceptible tyranny is upheld by powerful reasons, — such as the wish to be surrounded by their own family, to keep property in their own hands, the mutual help they ought to lend each other, the guarantees given to the administration by the fact that their agent is under the eyes of his fellow-citizens and neighbors. What does all this lead to? To the fact that local interests supersede all questions of public interest; the centralized will of Paris is frequently overthrown in the provinces, the truth of things is disguised, and country communities snap their fingers at government. In short, after the main public necessities have been attended to, it will be seen that the laws, instead of acting upon the masses, receive their impulse from them; the populations adapt the law to themselves and not themselves to the law.

Whoever has travelled in the south or west of France, or in Alsace, in any other way than from inn to inn to see buildings and landscapes, will surely admit the truth of these remarks. The results of middle-class nepotism may be, at present, merely isolated evils; but the tendency of existing laws is to increase them. This low-level despotism can and will cause great disasters, and the events of the drama about to be played in the valley of Les Aigues will prove it.



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The monarchical and imperial systems, more rashly overthrown than people realize, remedied these abuses by means of certain consecrated lives, by classifications and categories and by those particular counterpoises since so absurdly defined as "privileges." There are no privileges now, when every human being is free to climb the greased pole of power. But surely it would be safer to allow open and avowed privileges than those which are underhand, based on trickery, subversive of what should be public spirit, and continuing the work of despotism on a lower and baser level than heretofore. May we not have overthrown noble tyrants devoted to their country's good, to create the tyranny of selfish interests? Shall power lurk in secret places, instead of radiating from its natural source? This is worth thinking about. The spirit of local sectionalism, such as we have now depicted it, will soon be seen to invade the Chamber.

Montcornet's friend, the late prefect, Comte de la Roche-Hugon, had lost his position just before the last arrival of the general at Les Aigues. This dismissal drove him into the ranks of the Liberal opposition, where he became one of the chorus of the Left, a position he soon after abandoned for an embassy. His successor, luckily for Montcornet, was a son-in-law of the Marquis de Troisville, uncle of the countess, the Comte de Castéran. He welcomed Montcornet as a relation and begged him to continue his intimacy at the Prefecture. After listening to the general's complaints the Comte de Castéran invited the bishop, the attorney-general, the colonel of the gendarmerie, counsellor Sarcus, and the general commanding the division to meet him the next day at breakfast.

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The attorney-general, Baron Bourlac (so famous in the Chanterie and Rifaël suits), was one of those men well-known to all governments, who attach themselves to power, no matter in whose hands it is, and who make themselves invaluable by such devotion. Having owed his elevation in the first place to his fanaticism for the Emperor, he now owed the retention of his official rank to his inflexible character and the conscientiousness with which he fulfilled his duties. He who once implacably prosecuted the remnant of the Chouans now prosecuted the Bonapartists as implacably. But years and turmoils had somewhat subdued his energy and he had now become, like other old devils incarnate, perfectly charming in manner and ways.

The general explained his position and the fears of his bailiff, and spoke of the necessity of making an example and enforcing the rights of property.

The high functionaries listened gravely, making, however, no reply beyond mere platitudes, such as, "Undoubtedly, the laws must be upheld;" "Your cause is that of all land-owners;" "We will consider it; but, situated as we are, prudence is very necessary;" "A monarchy could certainly do more for the people than the people would do for itself, even if it were, as in 1793, the sovereign people;" "The masses suffer, and we are bound to do as much for them as for ourselves."

The relentless attorney-general expressed such kindly and benevolent views respecting the condition of the lower classes that our future Utopians, had they heard him, might have thought that the higher grade of government officials were already aware of the difficulties of that problem which modern society will be forced to solve.

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It may be well to say here that at this period of the Restoration, various bloody encounters had taken place in remote parts of the kingdom, caused by this very question of the pillage of woods, and the marauding rights which the peasants were everywhere arrogating to themselves. Neither the government nor the court liked these outbreaks, nor the shedding of blood which resulted from repression. Though they felt the necessity of rigorous measures, they nevertheless treated as blunderers the officials who were compelled to employ them, and dismissed them on the first pretence. The prefects were therefore anxious to shuffle out of such difficulties whenever possible.

At the very beginning of the conversation Sarcus (the rich) had made a sign to the prefect and the attorney-general which Montcornet did not see, but which set the tone of the discussion. The attorney-general was well aware of the state of mind of the inhabitants of the valley des Aigues through his subordinate, Soudry the young attorney.

"I foresee a terrible struggle," the latter had said to him. "They mean to kill the gendarmes; my spies tell me so. It will be very hard to convict them for it. The instant the jury feel they are incurring the hatred of the friends of the twenty or thirty prisoners, they will not sustain us, — we could not get them to convict for death, nor even for the galleys. Possibly by prosecuting in person you might get a few years' imprisonment for the actual murderers. Better shut our eyes than open them, if by opening them we bring on a collision which costs bloodshed and several thousand francs to the State, — not to speak of the cost of keeping the guilty in prison. It is too high a price to pay for a

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victory which will only reveal our judicial weakness to the eyes of all."

Montcornet, who was wholly without suspicion of the strength and influence of the Mediocracy in his happy valley, did not even mention Gaubertin, whose hand kept these embers of opposition always alive, though smouldering. After breakfast the attorney-general took Montcornet by the arm and led him to the Prefect's study. When the general left that room after their conference, he wrote to his wife that he was starting for Paris and should be absent a week. We shall see, after the execution of certain measures suggested by Baron Bourlac, the attorney-general, whether the secret advice he gave Montcornet was wise, and whether in conforming to it the count and Les Aigues were enabled to escape the "Evil grudge."

Some minds, eager after mere amusement, will complain that these various explanations are far too long; but we once more call attention to the fact that the historian of the manners, customs, and morals of his time must obey a law far more stringent than that imposed on the historian of mere facts. He must show the probability of everything, even the truth; whereas, in the domain of history, properly so called, the impossible must be accepted for the sole reason that it did happen. The vicissitudes of social or private life are brought about by a crowd of little causes derived from a thousand conditions. The man of science is forced to clear away the avalanche under which whole villages lie buried, to show you the pebbles brought down from the summit which alone can determine the formation of the mountain. If the historian of human life were simply telling you of a suicide, five hundred of which occur

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yearly in Paris, the melodrama is so commonplace that brief reasons and explanations are all that need be given; but how shall he make you see that the self-destruction of an estate could happen in these days when property is reckoned of more value than life? *De re vestra agitur*, said a maker of fables; this tale concerns the affairs and interests of all those, no matter who they be, who possess anything.

Remember that this coalition of a whole canton and of a little town against a general, who, in spite of his rash courage, had escaped the dangers of actual war, is going on in other districts against other men who seek only to do what is right by those districts. It is a coalition which to-day threatens every man, the man of genius, the statesman, the modern agriculturalist, — in short, all innovators.

This last explanation not only gives a true presentation of the personages of this drama, and a serious meaning even to its petty details, but it also throws a vivid light upon the scene where so many social interests are now marshalling.

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## X.

### THE SADNESS OF A HAPPY WOMAN.

At the moment when the general was getting into his calèche to go to the Prefecture, the countess and the two gentlemen reached the gate of the Avonne, where, for the last eighteen months, Michaud and his wife Olympe had made their home.

Whoso remembered the pavilion in the state in which we lately described it would have supposed it had been rebuilt. The bricks fallen or broken by time, and the cement lacking to their edges, were replaced; the slate roof had been cleaned, and the effect of the white balustrade against its bluish background restored the gay character of the architecture. The approaches to the building, formerly choked up and sandy, were now cared for by the man whose duty it was to keep the park roadways in order. The poultry-yard, stables, and cow-shed, relegated to the buildings near the pheasantry and hidden by clumps of trees, instead of afflicting the eye with their foul details, now blended those soft murmurs and cooings and the sound of flapping wings, which are among the most delightful accompaniments of Nature's eternal harmony, with the peculiar rustling sounds of the forest. The whole scene possessed the double charm of a natural, untouched forest and the elegance of an English park. The surroundings of the pavilion, in keeping with its own exterior, presented a certain noble, dignified, and cordial effect; while the

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hand of a young and happy woman gave to its interior a very different look from what it wore under the coarse neglect of Courtecuisse.

Just now the rich season of the year was putting forth its natural splendors. The perfume of the flower-beds blended with the wild odor of the woods; and the meadows near by, where the grass had been lately cut, sent up the fragrance of new-mown hay.

When the countess and her guests reached the end of one of the winding paths which led to the pavilion, they saw Madame Michaud, sitting in the open air before the door, employed in making a baby's garment. The young woman thus placed, thus employed, added the human charm that was needed to complete the scene, — a charm so touching in its actuality that painters have committed the error of endeavoring to convey it in their pictures. Such artists forget that the *soul* of a landscape, if they represent it truly, is so grand that the human element is crushed by it; whereas such a scene added to Nature limits her to the proportions of the personality, like a frame to which the mind of the spectator confines it. When Poussin, the Raffaelle of France, made a landscape accessory to his Shepherds of Arcadia he perceived plainly enough that man becomes diminutive and abject when Nature is made the principal feature on a canvas. In that picture August is in its glory, the harvest is ready, all simple and strong human interests are represented. There we find realized in nature the dream of many men whose uncertain life of mingled good and evil harshly mixed makes them long for peace and rest.

Let us now relate, in few words, the romance of this home. Justin Michaud did not reply very cordially to

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the advances made to him by the illustrious colonel of cuirassiers when first offered the situation of bailiff at Les Aigues. He was then thinking of re-entering the service. But while the negotiations, which naturally took him to the Hotel Montcornet, were going on, he met the countess's head waiting-maid. This young girl, who was entrusted to Madame de Montcornet by her parents, worthy farmers in the neighborhood of Alençon, had hopes of a little fortune, some twenty or thirty thousand francs, when the heirs were all of age. Like other farmers who marry young, and whose own parents are still living, the father and mother of the girl, being pinched for immediate means, placed her with the young countess. Madame de Montcornet had her taught to sew and to make dresses, arranged that she should take her meals alone, and was rewarded for the care she bestowed on Olympe Charel by one of those unconditional attachments which are so precious to Parisians.

Olympe Charel, a pretty Norman girl, rather stout, with fair hair of a golden tint, an animated face lighted by intelligent eyes, and distinguished by a finely curved thoroughbred nose, with a maidenly air in spite of a certain swaying Spanish manner of carrying herself, possessed all the points that a young girl born just above the level of the masses is likely to acquire from whatever close companionship a mistress is willing to allow her. Always suitably dressed, with modest bearing and manner, and able to express herself well, Michaud was soon in love with her, — all the more when he found that his sweetheart's dowry would one day be considerable. The obstacles came from the countess, who could not bear to part with so invaluable a maid;

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but when Montcornet explained to her the affairs at Les Aigues, she gave way, and the marriage was no longer delayed, except to obtain the consent of the parents, which, of course, was quickly given.

Michaud, like his general, looked upon his wife as a superior being, to whom he owed military obedience without a single reservation. He found in the peace of his home and his busy life out-of-doors the elements of a happiness soldiers long for when they give up their profession, — enough work to keep his body healthy, enough fatigue to let him know the charms of rest. In spite of his well-known intrepidity, Michaud had never been seriously wounded, and he had none of those physical pains which often sour the temper of veterans. Like all really strong men, his temper was even; his wife, therefore, loved him utterly. From the time they took up their abode in the pavilion, this happy home was the scene of a long honey-moon in harmony with Nature and with the art whose creations surrounded them, — a circumstance rare indeed! The things about us are seldom in keeping with the condition of our souls!

The picture was so pretty that the countess stopped short and pointed it out to Blondet and the abbé; for they could see Madame Michaud from where they stood, without her seeing them.

"I always come this way when I walk in the park," said the countess, softly. "I delight in looking at the pavilion and its two turtle-doves, as much as I delight in a fine view."

She leaned significantly on Blondet's arm, as if to make him share sentiments too delicate for words but which all women feel.

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"I wish I were a gate-keeper at Les Aigues," said Blondet, smiling. "Why! what troubles you?" he added, noticing an expression of sadness on the countess's face.

"Nothing," she replied.

Women are always hiding some important thought when they say, hypocritically, "It is nothing."

"A woman may be the victim of ideas which would seem very flimsy to you," she added, "but which, to us, are terrible. As for me, I envy Olympe's lot."

"God hears you," said the abbé, smiling as though to soften the sternness of his remark.

Madame de Montcornet grew seriously uneasy when she noticed an expression of fear and anxiety in Olympe's face and attitude. By the way a woman draws out her needle or sets her stitches another woman understands her thoughts. In fact, though wearing a rose-colored dress, with her hair carefully braided about her head, the bailiff's wife was thinking of matters that were out of keeping with her pretty dress, the glorious day, and the work her hands were engaged on. Her beautiful brow, and the glance she turned sometimes on the ground at her feet, sometimes on the foliage around, evidently seeing nothing, betrayed some deep anxiety, — all the more unconsciously because she supposed herself alone.

"Just as I was envying her! What can have saddened her?" whispered the countess to the abbé.

"Madame," he replied in the same tone, "tell me why man is often seized with vague and unaccountable presentiments of evil in the very midst of some perfect happiness?"

"Abbé!" said Blondet, smiling, "you talk like a

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bishop. Napoleon said, 'Nothing is stolen, all is bought!'"

"Such a maxim, uttered by those imperial lips, takes the proportions of society itself," replied the priest.

"Well, Olympe, my dear girl, what is the matter?" said the countess going up to her former maid. "You seem sad and thoughtful; is it a lover's quarrel?"

Madame Michaud's face, as she rose, changed completely.

"My dear," said Émile Blondet, in a fatherly tone, "I should like to know what clouds that brow of yours, in this pavilion where you are almost as well lodged as the Comte d' Artois at the Tuileries. It is like a nest of nightingales in a grove! And what a husband we have! — the bravest fellow of the young *garde*, and a handsome one, and who loves us to distraction! If I had known the advantages Montcornet has given you here I should have left my diatribing business and made myself a bailiff."

"It is not the place for a man of your talent, monsieur," replied Olympe, smiling at Blondet as an old acquaintance.

"But what troubles you, dear?" said the countess.

"Madame, I 'm afraid —"

"Afraid! of what?" said the countess, eagerly; for the word reminded her of Mouche and Fourchon.

"Afraid of the wolves, is that it?" said Émile, making Madame Michaud a sign, which she did not understand.

"No, monsieur, — afraid of the peasants. I was born in Le Perche, where of course there are some bad people, but I had no idea how wicked people could be until I came here. I try not to meddle in Michaud's

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affairs, but I do know that he distrusts the peasants so much that he goes armed, even in broad daylight, when he enters the forest. He warns his men to be always on the alert. Every now and then things happen about here that bode no good. The other day I was walking along the wall, near the source of that little sandy rivulet which comes from the forest and enters the park through a culvert about five hundred feet from here, — you know it, madame ? it is called Silver Spring, because of the star-flowers Bouret is said to have sown there. Well, I overheard the talk of two women who were washing their linen just where the path to Conches crosses the brook; they did not know I was there. Our house can be seen from that point, and one old woman pointed it out to the other, saying: 'See what a lot of money they have spent on the man who turned out Courtecuisse.' 'They ought to pay a man well when they set him to harass poor people as that man does,' answered the other. 'Well, it won't be for long,' said the first one; 'the thing is going to end soon. We have a right to our wood. The late Madame allowed us to take it. That's thirty years ago, so the right is ours.' 'We'll see what we shall see next winter,' replied the second. 'My man has sworn the great oath that all the gendarmerie in the world sha'n't keep us from getting our wood; he says he means to get it himself, and if the worst happens so much the worse for them!' 'Good God!' cried the other; 'we can't die of cold, and we must bake bread to eat! They want for nothing, *those others!* the wife of that scoundrel of a Michaud will be taken care of, I warrant you!' And then, madame, they said such horrible things of me and of you and of Monsieur le

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comte; and they finally declared that the farms would all be burned, and then the château."

"Bah!" said Émile, "idle talk! They have been robbing the general, and they will not be allowed to rob him any longer. These people are furious, that's the whole of it. You must remember that law and the government are always strongest everywhere, even in Burgundy. In case of an outbreak the general could bring a regiment of cavalry here if necessary."

The abbé made a sign to Madame Michaud from behind the countess, telling her to say no more about her fears, which were doubtless the effect of that second sight which true passion bestows. The soul, dwelling exclusively on one only being, grasps in the end the moral elements that surround it, and sees in them the makings of the future. The woman who loves feels the same presentiments that later illuminate her motherhood. Hence a certain melancholy, a certain inexplicable sadness which surprises men, who are one and all distracted from any such concentration of their souls by the cares of life and the continual necessity for action. All true love becomes to a woman an active contemplation, which is more or less lucid, more or less profound, according to her nature.

"Come, my dear, show your home to Monsieur Émile," said the countess, whose mind was so preoccupied that she forgot La Péchina, who was the ostensible object of her visit.

The interior of the restored pavilion was in keeping with its exterior. On the ground-floor the old divisions had been replaced, and the architect, sent from Paris with his own workmen (a cause of bitter complaint in the neighborhood against the master of Les Aigues),

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had made four rooms out of the space. First, an antechamber, at the farther end of which was a winding wooden staircase, behind which came the kitchen; on either side of the antechamber was a dining-room and a parlor panelled in oak now nearly black, with armorial bearings in the divisions of the ceiling. The architect chosen by Madame de Montcornet for the restoration of Les Aigues had taken care to put the furniture of this room in keeping with its original decoration.

At the time of which we write fashion had not yet given an exaggerated value to the relics of past ages. The carved settee, the high-backed chairs covered with tapestry, the consoles, the clocks, the tall embroidery frames, the tables, the lustres, hidden away in the second-hand shops of Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes were fifty per-cent cheaper than the modern, ready-made furniture of the faubourg Saint Antoine. The architect had therefore bought two or three cartloads of well-chosen old things, which, added to a few others discarded at the château, made the little salon of the gate of the Avonne an artistic creation. As to the dining-room, he painted it in browns and hung it with what was called a Scotch paper, and Madame Michaud added white cambric curtains with green borders at the windows, mahogany chairs covered with green cloth, two large buffets and a table, also in mahogany. This room, ornamented with engravings of military scenes, was heated by a porcelain stove, on each side of which were sporting-guns suspended on the walls. These adornments, which cost but little, were talked of throughout the whole valley as the last extreme of oriental luxury. Singular to say, they, more than anything

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else, excited the envy of Gaubertin, and whenever he thought of his fixed determination to bring Les Aigues to the hammer and cut it in pieces, he reserved for himself, *in petto*, this beautiful pavilion.

On the next floor three chambers sufficed for the household. At the windows were muslin curtains which reminded a Parisian of the particular taste and fancy of bourgeois requirements. Left to herself in the decoration of these rooms, Madame Michaud had chosen satin papers; on the mantel-shelf of her bedroom — which was furnished in that vulgar style of mahogany and Utrecht velvet which is seen everywhere, with its high-backed bed and canopy to which embroidered muslin curtains are fastened — stood an alabaster clock between two candelabra covered with gauze and flanked by two vases filled with artificial flowers protected by glass shades, a conjugal gift of the former cavalry sergeant. Above, under the roof, the bedrooms of the cook, the man-of-all-work, and La Péchina had benefited by the recent restoration.

"Olympe, my dear, you did not tell me all," said the countess, entering Madame Michaud's bedroom, and leaving Émile and the abbé on the stairway, whence they descended when they heard her shut the door.

Madame Michaud, to whom the abbé had contrived to whisper a word, was now anxious to say no more about her fears, which were really greater than she had intimated, and she therefore began to talk of a matter which reminded the countess of the object of her visit.

"I love Michaud, madame, as you know. Well, how would you like to have, in your own house, a rival always beside you?"

"A rival?"

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"Yes, madame; that swarthy girl you gave me to take care of loves Michaud without knowing it, poor thing! The child's conduct, long a mystery to me, has been cleared up in my mind for some days."

"Why, she is only thirteen years old!"

"I know that, madame. But you will admit that a woman who is three months pregnant and means to nurse her child herself may have some fears; but as I did not want to speak of this before those gentlemen, I talked a great deal of nonsense when you questioned me," added the generous creature, adroitly.

Madame Michaud was not really afraid of Geneviève Niseron, but for the last three days she was in mortal terror of some disaster from the peasantry.

"How did you discover this?" said the countess.

"From everything and from nothing," replied Olympe. "The poor little thing moves with the slowness of a tortoise when she is obliged to obey me, but she runs like a lizard when Justin asks for anything, she trembles like a leaf at the sound of his voice; and her face is that of a saint ascending to heaven when she looks at him. But she knows nothing about love; she has no idea that she loves him."

"Poor child!" said the countess with a smile and tone that were full of naïveté.

"And so," continued Madame Michaud, answering with a smile the smile of her late mistress, "Geneviève is gloomy when Justin is out of the house; if I ask her what she is thinking of she replies that she is afraid of Monsieur Rigou, or some such nonsense. She thinks people envy her, though she is as black as the inside of a chimney. When Justin is patrolling the woods at night the child is as anxious as I am. If I open my



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window to listen for the trot of his horse, I see a light in her room, which shows me that La Péchina (as they call her) is watching and waiting too. She never goes to bed, any more than I do, till he comes in."

"Thirteen!" exclaimed the countess; "unfortunate child!"

"Unfortunate? no. This passion will save her."

"From what?" asked Madame de Montcornet.

"From the fate which overtakes nearly all the girls of her age in these parts. Since I have taught her cleanliness she is much less ugly than she was; in fact, there is something odd and wild about her which attracts men. She is so changed that you would hardly recognize her. The son of that infamous innkeeper of the Grand-I-Vert, Nicolas, the worst fellow in the whole district, wants her; he hunts her like game. Though I can't believe that Monsieur Rigou, who changes his servant-girls every year or two is persecuting such a little fright, it is quite certain that Nicolas Tonsard is. Justin told me so. It would be a dreadful fate, for the people of this valley actually live like beasts; but Justin and our two servants and I watch her carefully. Therefore don't be uneasy, madame; she never goes out alone except in broad daylight, and then only as far as the gate of Conches. If by chance she fell into an ambush, her feeling for Justin would give her strength and wit to escape; for all women who have a preference in their hearts can resist a man they hate."

"It was about her that I came," said the countess, "and I little thought my visit could be so useful to you. That child, you know, can't remain thirteen; and she will probably grow better-looking."

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"Oh, madame," replied Olympe, smiling, "I am quite sure of Justin. What a man! what a heart! — If you only knew what a depth of gratitude he feels for his general, to whom, he says, he owes his happiness. He is only too devoted; he would risk his life for him here, as he would on the field of battle, and he forgets sometimes that he will one day be father of a family."

"Ah! I once regretted losing you," said the countess, with a glance that made Olympe blush; "but I regret it no longer, for I see you happy. What a sublime and noble thing is married love!" she added, speaking out the thought she had not dared express before the abbé.

Virginie de Troisville dropped into a revery, and Madame Michaud kept silence.

"Well, at least the girl is honest, is she not?" said the countess, as if waking from a dream.

"As honest as I am myself, madame."

"Discreet?"

"As the grave."

"Grateful?"

"Ah! madame; she has moments of humility and gentleness towards me which seem to show an angelic nature. She will kiss my hands and say the most upsetting things. 'Can we die of love?' she asked me yesterday. 'Why do you ask me that?' I said. 'I want to know if love is a disease.'"

"Did she really say that?"

"If I could remember her exact words I would tell you a great deal more," replied Olympe; "she appears to know much more than I do."

"Do you think, my dear, that she could take your

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place in my service. I can't do without an Olympe," said the countess, smiling in a rather sad way.

"Not yet, madame, — she is too young; but in two years' time, yes. If it becomes necessary that she should go away from here I will let you know. She ought to be educated, and she knows nothing of the world. Her grandfather, Père Niseron, is a man who would let his throat be cut sooner than tell a lie; he would die of hunger in a baker's shop; he has the strength of his opinions, and the girl was brought up to all such principles. La Péchina would consider herself your equal; for the old man has made her, as he says, a republican, — just as Père Fourchon has made Mouche a bohemian. As for me, I laugh at such ideas, but you might be displeased. She would revere you as her benefactress, but never as her superior. It can't be otherwise; she is wild and free like the swallows — her mother's blood counts for a good deal in what she is."

"Who was her mother?"

"Does n't madame know the story?" said Olympe. "Well, the son of the old sexton at Blangy, a splendid fellow, so the people about here tell me, was drafted at the great conscription. In 1809 young Niseron was still only an artilleryman, in a corps d'armée stationed in Illyria and Dalmatia when it received sudden orders to advance through Hungary and cut off the retreat of the Austrian army in case the Emperor won the battle of Wagram. Michaud told me all about Dalmatia, for he was there. Niseron, being so handsome a man, captivated a Montenegrin girl of Zahara among the mountains, who was not averse to the French garrison. This lost her the good-will of her compatriots, and life in her

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own town became impossible after the departure of the French. Zéna Kropoli, called in derision the Frenchwoman, followed the artillery, and came to France after the peace. Auguste Niseron asked permission to marry her; but the poor woman died at Vincennes in January, 1810, after giving birth to a daughter, our Geneviève. The papers necessary to make the marriage legal arrived a few days later. Auguste Niseron then wrote to his father to come and take the child, with a wetnurse he had got from its own country; and it was lucky he did, for he was killed soon after by the bursting of a shell at Montereau. Registered by the name of Geneviève and baptized at Soulanges, the little Dalmatian was taken under the protection of Mademoiselle Laguerre, who was touched by her story. It seems as if it were in the destiny of the child to be taken care of by the owners of Les Aigues! Père Niseron obtained its clothes, and now and then some help in money from Mademoiselle."

The countess and Olympe were just then standing before a window from which they could see Michaud approaching the abbé and Blondet, who were walking up and down the wide, semi-circular gravelled space which repeated on the park side of the pavilion the exterior half-moon; they were conversing earnestly.

"Where is she?" said the countess; "you make me anxious to see her."

"She is gone to carry milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard at the gate of Conches; she will soon be back, for it is more than an hour since she started."

"Well, I 'll go and meet her with those gentlemen," said Madame de Montcornet, going downstairs.

Just as the countess opened her parasol, Michaud

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came up and told her that the general had left her a widow for probably two days.

"Monsieur Michaud," said the countess, eagerly, "don't deceive me, there is something serious going on. Your wife is frightened, and if there are many persons like Père Fourchon, this part of the country will be uninhabitable — "

"If it were so, madame," answered Michaud, laughing, "we should not be in the land of the living, for nothing would be easier than to make away with us. The peasants grumble, that 's all. But as to passing from growls to blows, from pilfering to crime, they care too much for life and the free air of the fields. Olympe has been saying something that frightened you, but you know she is in state to be frightened at nothing," he added, drawing his wife's hand under his arm and pressing it to warn her to say no more.

"Cornevin! Juliette!" cried Madame Michaud, who soon saw the head of her old cook at the window. "I am going for a little walk; take care of the premises."

Two enormous dogs, who began to bark, proved that the effective of the garrison at the gate of the Avonne was not to be despised. Hearing the dogs, Cornevin, an old Percheron, Olympe's foster-father, came from behind the trees, showing a head such as no other region than Le Perche can manufacture. Cornevin was undoubtedly a Chouan in 1794 and 1799.

The whole party accompanied the countess along that one of the six forest avenues which led directly to the gate of Conches, crossing the Silver-spring rivulet. Madame de Montcornet walked in front with Blondet. The abbé and Michaud and his wife talked in a low

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voice of the revelation that had just been made to the countess of the state of the country.

"Perhaps it is providential," said the abbé; "for if madame is willing, we might, perhaps, by dint of benefits and constant consideration of their wants, change the hearts of these people."

At about six hundred feet from the pavilion and below the brook, the countess caught sight of a broken red jug and some spilt milk.

"Something has happened to the poor child!" she cried, calling to Michaud and his wife, who were returning to the pavilion.

"A misfortune like Perrette's," said Blondet, laughing.

"No; the poor child has been surprised and pursued, for the jug was thrown outside the path," said the abbé, examining the ground.

"Yes, that is certainly La Péchina's step," said Michaud; "the print of the feet, which have turned, you see, quickly, shows sudden terror. The child must have darted in the direction of the pavilion, trying to get back there."

Every one followed the traces which the bailiff pointed out as he walked along examining them. Presently he stopped in the middle of the path about a hundred feet from the broken jug, where the girl's foot-prints ceased.

"Here," he said, "she turned towards the Avonne; perhaps she was headed off from the direction of the pavilion.

"But she has been gone more than an hour," cried Madame Michaud.

Alarm was in all faces. The abbé ran towards the pavilion, examining the state of the road, while

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Michaud, impelled by the same thought, went up the path towards Conches.

"Good God! she fell here," said Michaud, returning from a place where the footsteps stopped near the brook, to that where they had turned in the road, and pointing to the ground, he added, "See!"

The marks were plainly seen of a body lying at full length on the sandy path.

"The footprints which have entered the wood are those of some one who wore knitted soles," said the abbé.

"A woman, then," said the countess.

"Down there, by the broken pitcher, are the footsteps of a man," added Michaud.

"I don't see traces of any other foot," said the abbé, who was tracking into the wood the prints of the woman's feet.

"She must have been lifted and carried into the wood," cried Michaud.

"That can't be, if it is really a woman's foot," said Blondet.

"It must be some trick of that wretch, Nicolas," said Michaud. "He has been watching La Péchina for some time. Only this morning I stood two hours under the bridge of the Avonne to see what he was about. A woman may have helped him."

"It is dreadful!" said the countess.

"They call it amusing themselves," added the priest, in a sad and grieved tone.

"Oh! La Péchina would never let them keep her," said the bailiff; "she is quite able to swim across the river. I shall look along the banks. Go home, my dear Olympe; and you gentlemen and madame, please to follow the avenue towards Conches."

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"What a country!" exclaimed the countess.

"There are scoundrels everywhere," replied Blondet.

"Is it true, Monsieur l'abbé," asked Madame de Montcornet, "that I saved the poor child from the clutches of Rigou?"

"Every young girl over fifteen years of age whom you may protect at the château is saved from that monster," answered the abbé. "In trying to get possession of La Péchina from her earliest years, the apostate sought to satisfy both his lust and his vengeance. When I took Père Niseron as sexton I told him what Rigou's intentions were. That is one of the causes of the late mayor's rancor against me; his hatred grew out of it. Père Niseron said to him solemnly that he would kill him if any harm came to Geneviève, and he made him responsible for all attempts upon the poor child's honor. I can't help thinking that this pursuit of Nicolas is the result of some infernal collusion with Rigou, who thinks he can do as he likes with these people."

"Does n't he fear the law?"

"In the first place, he is father-in-law of the prosecuting-attorney," said the abbé, pausing to listen. "And then," he resumed, "you have no conception of the utter indifference of the rural police to what is done around them. So long as the peasants do not burn the farm-houses and buildings, commit no murders, poison no one, and pay their taxes, they let them do as they like; and as these people are not restrained by any religious principle, horrible things happen every day. On the other side of the Avonne helpless old men are afraid to stay in their own homes, for they are allowed nothing to eat; they wander out into the fields as far as

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their tottering legs can bear them, knowing well that if they take to their beds they will die for want of food. Monsieur Sarcus, the magistrate, tells me that if they arrested and tried all criminals, the costs would ruin the municipality."

"Then he at least sees how things are?" said Blondet.

"Monseigneur thoroughly understands the condition of the valley, and especially the state of this district," continued the abbé. "Religion alone can cure such evils; the law seems to me powerless, modified as it is now—"

The words were interrupted by loud cries from the woods, and the countess, preceded by Émile and the abbé, sprang bravely into the brushwood in the direction of the sounds.

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## XI.

### THE OARISTYS, EIGHTEENTH ECLOGUE OF THEOCRITUS; LITTLE ADMIRED ON THE POLICE CALENDAR.

THE sagacity of a savage, which Michaud's new occupation had developed among his faculties, joined to an acquaintance with the passions and interests of Blangy, enabled him partially to understand a third idyl in the Greek style, which poor villagers like Tonsard, and middle-aged rich men like Rigou, translate *freely* — to use the classic word — in the depths of their country solitudes.

Nicolas, Tonsard's second son, had drawn an unlucky number at a recent conscription. Two years earlier his eldest brother had been pronounced, through the influence of Soudry, Gaubertin, and Sarcus the rich, unfit for military service, on account of a pretended weakness in the muscles of the right arm ; but as Jean-Louis had since wielded instruments of husbandry with remarkable force and skill, a good deal of talk on the subject had gone through the district. Soudry, Rigou, and Gaubertin, who were the special protectors of the family, had warned Tonsard that he must not expect to save Nicolas, who was tall and vigorous, from being recruited if he drew a fatal number. Nevertheless, Gaubertin and Rigou were so well aware of the importance of conciliating bold men able and willing to do mischief, if properly directed against Les Aigues, that

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Rigou held out certain hopes of safety to Tonsard and his son. The late monk was occasionally visited by Catherine Tonsard who was very devoted to her brother Nicolas; on one such occasion Rigou advised her to appeal to the general and the countess.

"They may be glad to do you this service to cajole you; in that case, it is just so much gained from the enemy," he said. "If the Shopman refuses, then we shall see what we shall see."

Rigou foresaw that the general's refusal would pass as one wrong the more done by the land-owner to the peasantry, and would bind Tonsard by an additional motive of gratitude to the coalition, in case the crafty mind of the innkeeper could suggest to him some plausible way of liberating Nicolas.

Nicolas, who was soon to appear before the examining board, had little hope of the general's intervention because of the harm done to Les Aigues by all the members of the Tonsard family. His passion, or to speak more correctly, his caprice and obstinate pursuit of La Péchina were so aggravated by the prospect of his immediate departure, which left him no time to seduce her, that he resolved on attempting violence. The child's contempt for her prosecutor, plainly shown, excited the Lovelace of the Grand-I-Vert to a hatred whose fury was equalled only by his desires. For the last three days he had been watching for La Péchina, and the poor child knew she was watched. Between Nicolas and his prey the same sort of understanding existed which there is between the hunter and the game. When the girl was at some little distance from the pavilion she saw Nicolas in one of the paths which ran parallel to the walls of the park, leading to the

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bridge of the Avonne. She could easily have escaped the man's pursuit had she appealed to her grandfather; but all young girls, even the most unsophisticated, have a strange fear, possibly instinctive, of trusting to their natural protectors under the like circumstances.

Geneviève had heard Père Niseron take an oath to kill any man, no matter who he was, who should dare to *touch* (that was his word) his granddaughter. The old man thought the child amply protected by the halo of white hair and honor which a spotless life of three-score years and ten had laid upon his brow. The vision of bloody scenes terrifies the imagination of young girls so that they need not dive to the bottom of their hearts for other numerous and inquisitive reasons which seal their lips.

When La Péchina started with the milk which Madame Michaud had sent to the daughter of Gaillard, the keeper of the gate of Conches, whose cow had just calved, she looked about her cautiously, like a cat when it ventures out into the street. She saw no signs of Nicolas; she listened to the silence, as the poet says, and hearing nothing, she concluded that the rascal had gone to his day's work. The peasants were just beginning to cut the rye; for they were in the habit of getting in their own harvests first, so as to benefit by the best strength of the mowers. But Nicolas was not a man to mind losing a day's work, — especially now that he expected to leave the country after the fair at Soulanges and begin, as the country people say, the new life of a soldier.

When La Péchina, with the jug on her head, was about half-way, Nicolas slid like a wild-cat down the trunk of an elm, among the branches of which he was

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hiding, and fell like a thunderbolt in front of the girl, who flung away her pitcher and trusted to her fleet legs to regain the pavilion. But a hundred feet farther on, Catherine Tonsard, who was on the watch, rushed out of the wood and knocked so violently against the flying girl that she was thrown down. The violence of the fall made her unconscious. Catherine picked her up and carried her into the woods to the middle of a tiny meadow where the Silver-spring brook bubbled up.

Catherine Tonsard was tall and strong, and in every respect the type of woman whom painters and sculptors take, as the Republic did in former days, for their figures of Liberty. She charmed the young men of the valley of the Avonne with her voluminous bosom, her muscular legs, and a waist as robust as it was flexible; with her plump arms, her eyes that could flash and sparkle, and her jaunty air; with the masses of hair twisted in coils around her head, her masculine forehead and her red lips curling with that same ferocious smile which Eugène Delacroix and David (of Angers) caught and represented so admirably. True image of the People, this fiery and swarthy creature seemed to emit revolt through her piercing yellow eyes, blazing with the insolence of a soldier. She inherited from her father so violent a nature that the whole family, except Tonsard, and all who frequented the tavern feared her.

"Well, how are you now?" she said to La Péchina as the latter recovered consciousness.

Catherine had placed her victim on a little mound beside the brook and was bringing her to her senses with dashes of cold water. "Where am I?" said the child, opening her beautiful black eyes through which a sun-ray seemed to glide.

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"Ah!" said Catherine, "if it had n't been for me you 'd have been killed."

"Thank you," said the girl, still bewildered; "what happened to me?"

"You stumbled over a root and fell flat in the road over there, as if shot. Ha! how you did run!"

"It was your brother who made me," said La Péchina, remembering Nicolas.

"My brother? I did not see him," said Catherine. "What did he do to you, poor fellow, that should make you fly as if he were a wolf? Is n't he handsomer than your Monsieur Michaud?"

"Oh!" said the girl, contemptuously.

"See here, little one; you are laying up a crop of evils for yourself by loving those who persecute us. Why don't you keep to our side?"

"Why don't you come to church; and why do you steal things night and day?" asked the child.

"So you let those people talk you over!" sneered Catherine. "They love us, don't they? — just as they love their food which they get out of us, and they want new dishes every day. Did you ever know one of them to marry a peasant-girl? Not they! Does Sarcus the rich let his son marry that handsome Gatienne Giboulard? Not he, though she is the daughter of a rich upholsterer. You have never been at the Tivoli ball at Soulanges in Socquard's tavern; you had better come. You 'll see 'em all there, these bourgeois fellows, and you 'll find they are not worth the money we shall get out of them when we 've pulled them down. Come to the fair this year!"

"They say it 's fine, that Soulanges fair!" cried La Péchina, artlessly.

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"I 'll tell you what it is in two words," said Catherine. "If you are handsome you 're well ogled. What is the good of being as pretty as you are if you are not admired by the men? Ha! when I heard one of them say for the first time, 'What a fine sprig of a girl!' all my blood was on fire. It was at Socquard's, in the middle of a dance; my grandfather, Fourchon, who was playing the clarionet, heard it and laughed. Tivoli seemed to me as grand and fine as heaven itself. It 's lighted up, my dear, with glass lamps, and you 'll think you are in paradise. All the gentlemen of Soulanges and Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes will be there. Ever since that first night I 've loved the place where those words rang in my ears like military music. It 's worth giving your eternity to hear such words said of you by a man you love."

"Yes, perhaps," replied La Péchina, thoughtfully.

"Then come, and get the praise of men; you 're sure of it!" cried Catherine. "Ha! you 'll have a fine chance, handsome as you are, to pick up good luck. There 's the son of Monsieur Lupin, Amaury, he might marry you. But that 's not all; if you only knew what comforts you can find there against vexation and worry. Why, Socquard's boiled wine will make you forget every trouble you ever had. Fancy! it can make you dream, and feel as light as a bird. Did n't you ever drink boiled wine? Then you don't know what life is."

The privilege enjoyed by older persons to wet their throats with boiled wine excites the curiosity of the children of the peasantry over twelve years of age to such a degree that Geneviève had once put her lips to a glass of boiled wine ordered by the doctor for her grandfather when ill. The taste had left a sort of magic

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influence in the memory of the poor child, which may explain the interest with which she listened, and on which the evil-minded Catherine counted to carry out a plan already half-successful. No doubt she was trying to bring her victim, giddy from the fall, to the moral intoxication so dangerous to young women living in the wilds of nature, whose imagination, deprived of other nourishment, is all the more ardent when the occasion comes to exercise it. Boiled wine, which Catherine had held in reserve, was to end the matter by intoxicating the victim.

"What do they put into it?" asked La Péchina.

"All sorts of things," replied Catherine, glancing back to see if her brother were coming; "in the first place, those what d' ye call 'ems that come from India, cinnamon, and herbs that change you by magic, — you fancy you have everything you wish for; boiled wine makes you happy! you can snap your fingers at all your troubles!"

"I should be afraid to drink boiled wine at a dance," said La Péchina.

"Afraid of what?" asked Catherine. "There 's not the slightest danger. Think what lots of people there will be. All the bourgeois will be looking at us! Ah! it is one of those days that make up for all our misery. See it and die, — for it 's enough to satisfy any one."

"If Monsieur and Madame Michaud would only take me!" cried La Péchina, her eyes blazing.

"Ask your grandfather Niseron; you have not given him up, poor dear man, and he 'd be pleased to see you admired like a little queen. Why do you like those Arminacs the Michauds better than your grandfather and the Burgundians. It 's bad to neglect your own



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people. Besides, why should the Michauds object if your grandfather takes you to the fair? Oh! if you knew what it is to reign over a man and put him beside himself, and say to him, as I say to Godain, "Go there!" and he goes, "Do that!" and he does it! You've got it in you, little one, to turn the head of a bourgeois like that son of Monsieur Lupin. Monsieur Amaury took a fancy to my sister Marie because she is fair and because he is half-afraid of me; but he'd adore you, for ever since those people at the pavilion have spruced you up a bit you've got the airs of an empress."

Adroitly leading the innocent heart to forget Nicolas and so put it off its guard, Catherine distilled into the girl the insidious nectar of compliments. Unawares, she touched a secret wound. La Péchina, without being other than a poor peasant girl, was a specimen of alarming precocity, like many another creature doomed to die as prematurely as it blooms. Strange product of Burgundian and Montenegrin blood, conceived and borne amid the toils of war, the girl was doubtless in many ways the result of her congenital circumstances. Thin, slender, brown as a tobacco leaf, and short in stature, she nevertheless possessed extraordinary strength, — a strength unseen by the eyes of peasants, to whom the mysteries of the nervous system are unknown. Nerves are not admitted into the medical rural mind.

At thirteen years of age Geneviève had completed her growth, though she was hardly as tall as an ordinary girl of her age. Did her face owe its topaz skin, so dark and yet so brilliant, dark in tone and brilliant in the quality of its tissue, giving a look of age to the

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childish face, to her Montenegrin origin, or to the ardent sun of Burgundy? Medical science may dismiss the inquiry. The premature old age on the surface of the face was counterbalanced by the glow, the fire, the wealth of light which made the eyes two stars. Like all eyes which fill with sunlight and need, perhaps, some sheltering screen, the eyelids were fringed with lashes of extraordinary length. The hair, of a bluish black, long and fine and abundant, crowned a brow moulded like that of the Farnese Juno. That magnificent diadem of hair, those grand Armenian eyes, that celestial brow eclipsed the rest of the face. The nose, though pure in form as it left the brow, and graceful in curve, ended in flattened and flaring nostrils. Anger increased this effect at times, and then the face wore an absolutely furious expression. All the lower part of the face, like the lower part of the nose, seemed unfinished, as if the clay in the hands of the divine sculptor had proved insufficient. Between the lower lip and the chin the space was so short that any one taking La Péchina by the chin would have rubbed the lip; but the teeth prevented all notice of this defect. One might almost believe those little bones had souls, so brilliant were they, so polished, so transparent, so exquisitely shaped, disclosed as they were by too wide a mouth, curved in lines that bore resemblance to the fantastic shapes of coral. The shells of the ears were so transparent to the light that in the sunshine they were rose-colored. The complexion, though sun-burned, showed a marvellous delicacy in the texture of the skin. If, as Buffon declared, love lies in touch, the softness of the girl's skin must have had the penetrating and inciting influence of the fragrance of daturas. The chest

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and indeed the whole body was alarmingly thin; but the feet and hands, of alluring delicacy, showed remarkable nervous power, and a vigorous organism.

This mixture of diabolical imperfections and divine beauties, harmonious in spite of discords, for they blended in a species of savage dignity, also this triumph of a powerful soul over a feeble body, as written in those eyes, made the child, when once seen, unforgettable. Nature had wished to make that frail young being a woman; the circumstances of her conception moulded her with the face and body of a boy. A poet observing the strange creature would have declared her native clime to be Arabia the Blest; she belonged to the Afrite and Genii of Arabian tales. Her face told no lies. She had the soul of that glance of fire, the intellect of those lips made brilliant by the bewitching teeth, the thought enshrined within that glorious brow, the passion of those nostrils ready at all moments to snort flame. Therefore love, such as we imagine it on burning sands, in lonely deserts, filled that heart of twenty in the breast of a child, doomed, like the snowy heights of Montenegro, to wear no flowers of the spring.

Observers ought now to understand how it was that La Péchina, from whom passion issued by every pore, awakened in perverted natures the feelings deadened by abuse; just as water fills the mouth at sight of those twisted, blotched, and speckled fruits which gourmands know by experience, and beneath whose skin nature has put the rarest flavors and perfumes. Why did Nicolas, that vulgar laborer, pursue this being who was worthy of a poet, while the eyes of the country-folk pitied her as a sickly deformity? Why did Rigou, the old man, feel the passion of a young one for this girl? Which

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of the two men was young, and which was old? Was the young peasant as blasé as the old usurer? Why did these two extremes of life meet in one common and devilish caprice? Does the vigor that draws to its close resemble the vigor that is only dawning? The moral perversities of men are gulfs guarded by sphinxes; they begin and end in questions to which there is no answer.

The exclamation, formerly quoted, of the countess, "Piccina!" when she first saw Geneviève by the roadside, open-mouthed at sight of the carriage and the elegantly dressed woman within it, will be understood. This girl, almost a dwarf, of Montenegrin vigor, loved the handsome, noble bailiff, as children of her age love, when they do love, that is to say, with childlike passion, with the strength of youth, with the devotion which in truly virgin souls gives birth to divinest poesy. Catherine had just swept her coarse hands across the sensitive strings of that choice harp, strung to the breaking-point. To dance before Michaud, to shine at the Soulanges ball and inscribe herself on the memory of that adored master! What glorious thoughts! To fling them into that volcanic head was like casting live coal upon straw dried in the August sun.

"No, Catherine," replied La Péchina, "I am ugly and puny; my lot is to sit in a corner and never to be married, but live alone in the world."

"Men like weaklings," said Catherine. "You see me, don't you?" she added, showing her handsome, strong arms. "I please Godain, who is a poor stick; I please that little Charles, the count's groom; but Lupin's son is afraid of me. I tell you it is the small kind of men who love me, and who say when they see

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me go by at Ville-aux-Fayes and at Soulanges, 'Ha! what a fine girl!' Now *you*, that's another thing; you'll please the fine men."

"Ah! Catherine, if it were true — that!" cried the bewitched child.

"It is true, it is so true that Nicolas, the handsomest man in the canton, is mad about you; he dreams of you, he is losing his mind; and yet all the other girls are in love with him. He is a fine lad! If you'll put on a white dress and yellow ribbons, and come to Socquard's for the midsummer ball, you'll be the handsomest girl there, and all the fine people from Ville-aux-Fayes will see you. Come, won't you? — See here, I've been cutting grass for the cows, and I brought some boiled wine in my gourd; Socquard gave it me this morning," she added quickly, seeing the half-delirious expression in La Péchina's eyes which women understand so well. "We'll share it together, and you'll fancy the men are in love with you."

During this conversation Nicolas, choosing the grassy spots to step on, had noiselessly slipped behind the trunk of an old oak near which his sister had seated La Péchina. Catherine, who had now and then cast her eyes behind her, saw her brother as she turned to get the boiled wine.

"Here, take some," she said, offering it.

"It burns me!" cried Geneviève, giving back the gourd, after taking two or three swallows from it.

"Silly child!" replied Catherine; "see here!" and she emptied the rustic bottle without taking breath. "See how it slips down; it goes like a sunbeam into the stomach."

"But I ought to be carrying the milk to Mademoi-

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selle Gaillard," cried Geneviève; "and it is all spilt! Nicolas frightened me so!"

"Don't you like Nicolas?"

"No," answered Geneviève. "Why does he persecute me? He can get plenty other girls, who are willing."

"But if he likes you better than all the other girls in the valley—"

"So much the worse for him."

"I see you don't know him," answered Catherine, as she seized the girl rapidly by the waist and flung her on the grass, holding her down in that position with her strong arms. At this moment Nicholas appeared. Seeing her odious persecutor, the child screamed with all her might, and drove him five feet away with a violent kick in the stomach; then she twisted herself like an acrobat, with a dexterity for which Catherine was not prepared, and rose to run away. Catherine, still on the ground, caught her by one foot and threw her headlong on her face. This frightful fall stopped the brave child's cries for a moment. Nicholas attempted, furiously, to seize his victim, but she, though giddy from the wine and the fall, caught him by the throat in a grip of iron.

"Help! she's strangling me, Catherine," cried Nicolas, in a stifled voice.

La Péchina uttered piercing screams, which Catherine tried to choke by putting her hands over the girl's mouth, but she bit them and drew blood. It was at this moment that Blondet, the countess, and the abbé appeared at the edge of the wood.

"Here are those Aigues people!" exclaimed Catherine, helping Geneviève to rise.

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"Do you want to live?" hissed Nicolas in the child's ear.

"What then?" she asked.

"Tell them we were all playing, and I'll forgive you," said Nicolas, in a threatening voice.

"Little wretch, mind you say it!" repeated Catherine, whose glance was more terrifying than her brother's murderous threat.

"Yes, I will, if you let me alone," replied the child. "But anyhow I will never go out again without my scissors."

"You are to hold your tongue, or I'll drown you in the Avonne," said Catherine, ferociously.

"You are monsters," cried the abbé, coming up; "you ought to be arrested and taken to the assizes."

"Ha! and pray what do you do in your drawing-rooms?" said Nicolas, looking full at the countess and Blondet. "You play and amuse yourselves, don't you? Well, so do we, in the fields which are ours. We can't always work; we must play sometimes, — ask my sister and La Péchina."

"How do you fight if you call that playing?" cried Blondet.

Nicolas gave him a murderous look.

"Speak!" said Catherine, gripping La Péchina by the forearm and leaving a blue bracelet on the flesh. "Were not we amusing ourselves?"

"Yes, madame, we were amusing ourselves," said the child, exhausted by her display of strength, and now breaking down as though she were about to faint.

"You hear what she says, madame," said Catherine, boldly, giving the countess one of those looks which women give each other like dagger thrusts.

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She took her brother's arm, and the pair walked off, not mistaking the opinion they left behind them in the minds of the three persons who had interrupted the scene. Nicolas twice looked back, and twice encountered Blondet's gaze. The journalist continued to watch the tall scoundrel, who was broad in the shoulders, healthy and vigorous in complexion, with black hair curling tightly, and whose rather soft face showed upon its lips and around the mouth certain lines which reveal the peculiar cruelty that characterizes sluggards and voluptuaries. Catherine swung her petticoat, striped blue and white, with an air of insolent coquetry.

"Cain and his wife!" said Blondet to the abbé.

"You are nearer the truth than you know," replied the priest.

"Ah! Monsieur le curé, what will they do to me?" said La Péchina, when the brother and sister were out of sight.

The countess, as white as her handkerchief, was so overcome that she heard neither Blondet nor the abbé nor La Péchina.

"It is enough to drive one from this terrestial paradise," she said at last. "But the first thing of all is to save that child from their claws."

"You are right," said Blondet in a low voice. "That child is a poem, a living poem."

Just then the Montenegrin girl was in a state where soul and body smoke, as it were, after the conflagration of an anger which has driven all forces, physical and intellectual, to their utmost tension. It is an unspeakable and supreme splendor, which reveals itself only under the pressure of some frenzy, be it resistance or victory, love or martyrdom. She had left home in a

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dress with alternate lines of brown and yellow, and a collarette which she pleated herself by rising before daylight; and she had not yet noticed the condition of her gown soiled by her struggle on the grass, and her collar torn in Catherine's grasp. Feeling her hair hanging loose, she looked about for her comb. At this moment Michaud, also attracted by the screams, came upon the scene. Seeing her god, La Péchina recovered her full strength. "Monsieur Michaud," she cried, "he did not even touch me!"

The cry, the look, the action of the girl were an eloquent commentary, and told more to Blondet and the abbé than Madame Michaud had told the countess about the passion of that strange nature for the bailiff, who was utterly unconscious of it.

"The scoundrel!" cried Michaud.

Then, with an involuntary and impotent gesture, such as mad men and wise men both can be forced into giving, he shook his fist in the direction in which he had caught sight of Nicolas disappearing with his sister.

"Then you were not playing?" said the abbé with a searching look at La Péchina.

"Don't fret her," interposed the countess; "let us return to the pavilion."

Geneviève, though quite exhausted, found strength under Michaud's eyes to walk. The countess followed the bailiff through one of the by-paths known to keepers and poachers where only two can go abreast, and which led to the gate of the Avonne.

"Michaud," said the countess when they reached the depth of the wood, "We must find some way of ridding the neighborhood of such vile people; that child is actually in danger of death."

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"In the first place," replied Michaud, "Geneviève shall not leave the pavilion. My wife will be glad to take the nephew of Vatel, who has the care of the park roads, into the house. With Gounod (that is his name) and old Cornevin, my wife's foster-father, always at hand, La Péchina need never go out without a protector."

"I will tell Monsieur to make up this extra expense to you," said the countess. "But this does not rid us of that Nicolas. How can we manage that?"

"The means are easy and right at hand," answered Michaud. "Nicolas is to appear very soon before the court of appeals on the draft. The general, instead of asking for his release, as the Tonsards expect, has only to advise his being sent to the army —"

"If necessary, I will go myself," said the countess, "and see my cousin, de Castéran, the prefect. But until then, I tremble for that child —"

The words were said at the end of the path close to the open space by the bridge. As they reached the edge of the bank the countess gave a cry; Michaud advanced to help her, thinking she had struck her foot against a stone; but he shuddered at the sight that met his eyes.

Marie Tonsard and Bonnébault, seated below the bank, seemed to be conversing, but were no doubt hiding there to hear what passed. Evidently they had left the wood as the party advanced towards them.

Bonnébault, a tall, wiry fellow, had lately returned to Conches after six years' service in the cavalry, with a permanent discharge due to his evil conduct, — his example being likely to ruin better men. He wore mustachios and a small chin-tuft; a peculiarity which, joined to his military carriage, made him the reigning

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fancy of all the girls in the valley. His hair, in common with that of other soldiers, was cut very short behind, but he frizzed it on the top of his head, brushing up the ends with a dandy air; on it his foraging cap was jauntily tilted to one side. Compared to the peasants, who were mostly in rags, like Mouche and Fourchon, he seemed gorgeous in his linen trousers, boots, and short waistcoat. These articles, bought at the time of his liberation, were, it is true, somewhat the worse for a life in the fields; but this village cock-of-the walk had others in reserve for balls and holidays. He lived, it must be said, on the gifts of his female friends, which, liberal as they were, hardly sufficed for the libations, the dissipations, and the squanderings of all kinds which resulted from his intimacy with the Café de la Paix.

Cowardice is like courage; of both there are various kinds. Bonnébault would have fought like a brave soldier, but he was weak in presence of his vices and his desires. Lazy as a lizard, that is to say, active only when it suited him, without the slightest decency, arrogant and base, able for much but neglectful of all, the sole pleasure of this "breaker of hearts and plates" to use a barrack term, was to do evil or inflict damage. Such a nature does as much harm in rural communities as it does in a regiment. Bonnébault, like Tonsard and like Fourchon, desired to live well and do nothing; and he had his plans laid. Making the most of his gallant appearance with increasing success, and of his talents for billiards with alternate loss and gain, he flattered himself that the day would come when he could marry Mademoiselle Aglaë Socquard, only daughter of the proprietor of the Café de la Paix, a resort

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which was to Soulanges what, relatively speaking, Ranelagh is to the Bois de Boulogne. To get into the business of tavern-keeping, to manage the public balls, what a fine career for the marshal's bâton of a ne'er-do-weel! These morals, this life, this nature, were so plainly stamped upon the face of the low-lived profligate that the countess was betrayed into an exclamation when she beheld the pair, for they gave her the sensation of beholding snakes.

Marie, desperately in love with Bonnébault, would have robbed for his benefit. Those moustachios, the swaggering gait of a trooper, the fellow's smart clothes, all went to her heart as the manners and charms of a de Marsay touch that of a pretty Parisian. Each social sphere has its own standard of distinction. The jealous Marie rebuffed Amaury Lupin, the other dandy of the little town, her mind being made up to become Madame Bonnébault.

"Hey! you there, hi! come on!" cried Nicolas and Catherine from afar, catching sight of Marie and Bonnébault.

The sharp call echoed through the woods like the cry of savages.

Seeing the pair at his feet, Michaud shuddered and deeply repented having spoken. If Bonnébault and Marie Tonsard had overheard the conversation, nothing but harm could come of it. This event, insignificant as it seems, was destined, in the irritated state of feeling then existing between Les Aigues and the peasantry, to have a decisive influence on the fate of all, — just as victory or defeat in battle sometimes depends upon a brook which shepherds jump while cannon are unable to pass it.

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Gallantly bowing to the countess, Bonnébault passed Marie's arm through his own with a conquering air and took himself off triumphantly.

"The King of Hearts of the valley," muttered Michaud to the countess. "A dangerous man. When he loses twenty francs at billiards he would murder Rigou to get them back. He loves a crime as he does a pleasure."

"I have seen enough for to-day; take me home, gentlemen," murmured the countess, putting her hand on Émile's arm.

She bowed sadly to Madame Michaud, after watching La Péchina safely back to the pavilion. Olympe's depression was transferred to her mistress.

"Ah, madame," said the abbé, as they continued their way, "can it be that the difficulty of doing good is about to deter you? For the last five years I have slept on a pallet in a parsonage which has no furniture; I say mass in a church without believers; I preach to no hearers; I minister without fees or salary; I live on the six hundred francs the law allows me, asking nothing of my bishop, and I give the third of that in charity. Still, I am not hopeless. If you knew what my winters are in this place you would understand the strength of those words, — I am not hopeless. I keep myself warm with the belief that we can save this valley and bring it back to God. No matter for ourselves, madame; think of the future! If it is our duty to say to the poor, 'Learn how to be poor; that is, how to work, to endure, to strive,' it is equally our duty to say to the rich, 'Learn your duty as prosperous men,' — that is to say, 'Be wise, be intelligent in your benevolence; pious and virtuous in the place to which God

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has called you.' Ah! madame, you are only the steward of Him who grants you wealth; if you do not obey His behests you will never transmit to your children the prosperity He gives you. You will rob your posterity. If you follow in the steps of that poor singer's selfishness, which caused the evils that now terrify us, you will bring back the scaffolds on which your fathers died for the faults of their fathers. To do good humbly, in obscurity, in country solitudes, as Rigou now does evil, — ah! that indeed is prayer in action and dear to God. If in every district three souls only would work for good, France, our country, might be saved from the abyss that yawns; into which we are rushing headlong, through spiritual indifference to all that is not our own self-interest. Change! you must change your morals, change your ethics, and that will change your laws."

Though deeply moved as she listened to this grand utterance of true catholic charity, the countess answered in the fatal words, "We will consider it," — words of the rich, which contain that promise to the ear which saves their purses and enables them to stand with arms crossed in presence of all disaster, under pretext that they were powerless.

Hearing those words, the abbé bowed to Madame de Montcornet and turned off into a path which led him direct to the gate of Blangy.

"Belshazzar's feast is the everlasting symbol of the dying days of a caste, of an oligarchy, of a power!" he thought as he walked away. "My God! if it be Thy will to loose the poor like a torrent to reform society, I know, I comprehend, why it is that Thou hast abandoned the wealthy to their blindness!"

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## XII.

### SHOWETH HOW THE TAVERN IS THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT.

Old Mother Tonsard's screams brought a number of people from Blangy to know what was happening at the Grand-I-Vert, the distance from the village to the inn not being greater than that from the inn to the gate of Blangy. One of these inquiring visitors was old Niseron, La Péchina's grandfather, who was on his way, after ringing the second Angelus, to dig the vine-rows in his last little bit of ground.

Bent by toil, with pallid face and silvery hair, the old vinedresser, now the sole representative of civic virtue in the community, had been, during the Revolution, president of the Jacobin club at Ville-aux-Fayes, and a juror in the revolutionary tribunal of the district. Jean-François Niseron, carved out of the wood that the apostles were made of, was of the type of Saint Peter; whom painters and sculptors have united in representing with the square brow of the people, the thick, naturally curling hair of the laborer, the muscles of the man of toil, the complexion of a fisherman; with the large nose, the shrewd, half-mocking lips that scoff at fate, the neck and shoulders of the strong man who cuts his wood to cook his dinner while the doctrinaires of his opinions talk.

Such, at forty years of age on the breaking out of the Revolution, was this man, strong as iron, pure as

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gold. Advocate of the people, he believed in a republic through the very roll of that name, more formidable in sound perhaps than in reality. He believed in the republic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the brotherhood of man, in the exchange of noble sentiments, in the proclamation of virtue, in the choice of merit without intrigue, — in short, in all that the narrow limits of one arrondissement like Sparta make possible, and which the vast proportions of an empire make chimerical. He signed his beliefs with his blood, — his only son went to the war; he did more, he signed them with the prosperity of his life, — last sacrifice of self. Nephew and sole heir of the curate of Blangy, the then all-powerful tribune might have enforced his rights and recovered the property left by the priest to his pretty servant-girl, Arsène; but he respected his uncle's wishes and accepted poverty, which came upon him as rapidly as the fall of his cherished republic came upon France.

Never a farthing's worth, never so much as the branch of a tree belonging to another passed into the hands of this noble republican, who would have made the republic acceptable to the world if he and such as he could have guided it. He refused to buy the national domains; he denied the right of the Republic to confiscate property. In reply to all demands of the committee of public safety he asserted that the virtue of citizens would do for their sacred country what low political intriguers did for money. This patriot of antiquity publicly reproved Gaubertin's father for his secret treachery, his underhand bargaining, his malversations. He reprimanded the virtuous Mouchon, that representative of the people whose virtue was nothing more nor less than incapacity, — as it is with so many other legislators who, gorged



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with the greatest political resources that any nation ever gave, armed with the whole force of a people, are still unable to bring forth from them the grandeur which Richelieu wrung for France out of the weakness of a king. Consequently, citizen Niseron became a living reproach to the people about him. They endeavored to put him out of sight and mind with the reproachful remark, "Nothing satisfies that man."

The patriot-peasant returned to his cot at Blangy and watched the destruction, one by one, of his illusions; he saw his republic come to an end at the heels of an emperor, while he himself fell into utter poverty, to which Rigou stealthily managed to reduce him. And why? Because Niseron had never been willing to accept anything from him. Reiterated refusals showed the ex-priest in what profound contempt the nephew of the curate held him; and now that icy scorn was revenged by the terrible threat as to his little granddaughter, about which the Abbé Brossette spoke to the countess.

The old man had composed in his own mind a history of the twelve years of the French republic, filled with the glorious features which gave immortality to that heroic period to the exclusion of all else. The infamous deeds, the massacres, the spoliations, his virtuous soul ignored; he admired, with a single mind, the devotedness of the people, the "Vengeur," the gifts to the nation, the uprising of the country to defend its frontier; and he still pursued his dream that he might sleep in peace.

The Revolution produced many poets like old Niseron, who sang their poems in the country solitudes, in the army, openly or secretly, by deeds buried beneath the whirlwind of that storm, just as the wounded left be-

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hind to die in the great wars of the empire cried out, "Long live the Emperor!" This sublimity of soul belongs especially to France. The Abbé Brossette respected the convictions of the old man, who became simply but deeply attached to the priest from hearing him say, "The true republic is in the Gospel." The stanch republican carried the cross, and wore the sexton's robe, half-red, half-black, and was grave and dignified in church, — supporting himself by the triple functions with which he was invested by the abbé, who was able to give the fine old man, not, to be sure, enough to live on, but enough to keep him from dying of hunger.

Niseron, the Aristides of Blangy, spoke little, like all noble dupes who wrap themselves in the mantle of resignation; but he was never silent against evil, and the peasants feared him as thieves fear the police. He seldom came more than six times a year to the Grand-I-Vert, though he was always warmly welcomed there. The old man cursed the want of charity of the rich, — their selfishness disgusted him; and through this fibre of his mind he seemed to the peasants to belong to them; they were in the habit of saying, "Père Niseron does n't like the rich; he 's one of us."

The civic crown won by this noble life throughout the valley lay in these words: "That good old Niseron! there 's not a more honest man." Often taken as umpire in certain kinds of disputes, he embodied the meaning of that archaic term, — the village elder. Always extremely clean, though threadbare, he wore breeches, coarse woollen stockings, hob-nailed shoes, the distinctively French coat with large buttons and the broad-brimmed felt hat to which all old peasants cling; but

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for daily wear he kept a blue jacket so patched and darned that it looked like a bit of tapestry. The pride of a man who feels he is free, and knows he is worthy of freedom, gave to his countenance and his whole bearing a *something* that was inexpressibly noble; you would have felt he wore a robe, not rags.

"Hey! what 's happening so unusual?" he said, "I heard the noise down here from the belfry."

They told him of Vatel's attack on the old woman, talking all at once after the fashion of country-people.

"If she did n't cut the tree, Vatel was wrong; but if she did cut it, you have done two bad actions," said Père Niseron.

"Take some wine," said Tonsard, offering a full glass to the old man.

"Shall we start?" said Vermichel to the sheriff's officer.

"Yes," replied Brunet, "we must do without Père Fourchon and take the assistant at Couches. Go on before me; I have a paper to carry to the château. Rigou has gained his second suit, and I've got to deliver the verdict."

So saying, Monsieur Brunet, all the livelier for a couple of glasses of brandy, mounted his gray mare after saying good-bye to Père Niseron; for the whole valley were desirous in their hearts of the good man's esteem.

No science, not even that of statistics, can explain the rapidity with which news flies in the country, nor how it spreads over those ignorant and untaught regions which are, in France, a standing reproach to the government and to capitalists. Contemporaneous history can show that a famous banker, after driving post-

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horses to death between Waterloo and Paris (everybody knows why — he gained what the Emperor lost, a commission!) carried the fatal news only three hours in advance of rumor. So, not an hour after the encounter between old mother Tonsard and Vatel, a number of the customers of the Grand-I-Vert assembled there to hear the tale.

The first to come was Courtecuisse, in whom you would scarcely have recognized the once jovial forester, the rubicund do-nothing, whose wife made his morning coffee as we have before seen. Aged, and thin, and haggard, he presented to all eyes a lesson that no one learned. "He tried to climb higher than the ladder," was what his neighbors said when others pitied him and blamed Rigou. "He wanted to be a bourgeois himself."

In fact, Courtecuisse did intend to pass for a bourgeois in buying the Bâchelerie, and he even boasted of it; though his wife went about the roads gathering up the horse-droppings. She and Courtecuisse got up before daylight, dug their garden, which was richly manured, and obtained several yearly crops from it, without being able to do more than pay the interest due to Rigou for the rest of the purchase-money. Their daughter, who was living at service in Auxerre, sent them her wages; but in spite of all their efforts, in spite of this help, the last day for the final payment was approaching and not a penny in hand with which to meet it. Madame Courtecuisse, who in former times occasionally allowed herself a bottle of boiled wine or a bit of roast meat, now drank nothing but water. Courtecuisse was afraid to go to the Grand-I-Vert lest he should have to leave three sous behind him. De-

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prived of power, he had lost his privilege of free drinks, and he bitterly complained, like all other fools, of man's ingratitude. In short, he found, according to the experience of all peasants bitten with the demon of proprietorship, that toil had increased and food decreased.

"Courtecuisse has done too much to the property," the people said, secretly envying his position. "He ought to have waited till he had paid the money down and was master before he put up those fruit palings."

With the help of his wife he had managed to manure and cultivate the three acres of land sold to him by Rigou, together with the garden adjoining the house, which was beginning to be productive; and he was in danger of being turned out of it all. Clothed in rags like Fourchon, poor Courtecuisse, who lately wore the boots and gaiters of a huntsman, now thrust his feet into sabots and accused "the rich" of Les Aigues of having caused his destitution. These wearing anxieties had given to the fat little man and his once smiling and rosy face a gloomy and dazed expression, as though he were ill from the effects of poison or with some chronic malady.

"What's the matter with you, Monsieur Courtecuisse; is your tongue tied?" asked Tonsard, as the man continued silent after he had told him about the battle which had just taken place.

"No, no!" cried Madame Tonsard; "he need n't complain of the midwife who cut his string, — she made a good job of it."

"It is enough to make a man dumb, thinking from morning till night of some way to escape Rigou," said the premature old man, gloomily.

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"Bah!" said old Mother Tonsard, "you've got a pretty daughter, seventeen years old. If she's a good girl you can easily manage matters with that old jail-bird —"

"We sent her to Auxerre two years ago to Madame Mariotte the elder, to keep her out of harm's way; I'd rather die than —"

"What a fool you are!" said Tonsard, "look at my girls, — are they any the worse? He who dares to say they are not as virtuous as marble images will have to do with my gun."

"It'll be hard to have to come to that," said Courtecuisse, shaking his head. "I'd rather earn the money by shooting one of those Arminacs."

"Well, I call it better for a girl to save a father than to wrap up her virtue and let it mildew," retorted the innkeeper.

Tonsard felt a sharp tap on his shoulder, delivered by Père Niseron.

"That is not a right thing to say!" cried the old man. "A father is the guardian of the honor of his family. It is by behaving as you do that scorn and contempt are brought upon us; it is because of such conduct that the People are accused of being unfit for liberty. The People should set an example of civic virtue and honor to the rich. You all sell yourselves to Rigou for gold; and if you don't sell him your daughters, at any rate you sell him your honor, — and it's wrong."

"Just see what a position Courtecuisse is in," said Tonsard.

"See what a position I am in," replied Père Niseron; "but I sleep in peace; there are no thorns in my pillow."

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"Let him talk, Tonsard," whispered his wife, "you know they're just *his notions*, poor dear man."

Bonnébault and Marie, Catherine and her brother came in at this moment in a state of exasperation, which had begun with Nicolas's failure, and was raised to the highest pitch by Michaud's advice to the countess about Bonnébault. As Nicolas entered the tavern he was uttering frightful threats against the Michaud family and Les Aigues.

"The harvest's coming; well, I vow I'll not go before I've lighted my pipe at their wheat-stacks," he cried, striking his fist on the table as he sat down.

"Mustn't yelp like that before people," said Godain, showing him Père Niseron.

"If the old fellow tells, I'll wring his neck," said Catherine. "He's had his day, that old peddler of foolish reasons! They call him virtuous; it's his temperament keeps him so, that's all."

Strange and noteworthy sight! — that of those lifted heads, that group of persons gathered in the reeking hovel, while old Mother Tonsard stood sentinel at the door as security for the secret words of the drinkers.

Of all those faces, that of Godain, Catherine's suitor, was perhaps the most alarming, though the least pronounced. Godain, a miser without money, — the cruellest of all misers, for he who seeks money surely takes precedence of him who hoards it, one turning his eagerness within himself, the other looking outside with terrible intentness, — Godain represented the type of the majority of peasant faces.

He was a journeyman, small in frame, and saved from the draft by not attaining the required military height; naturally lean and made more so by hard work

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and the enforced sobriety under which reluctant workers like Courtecuisse succumb. His face was no bigger than a man's fist, and was lighted by a pair of yellow eyes with greenish stripes and brown spots, in which a thirst for the possession of property was mingled with a concupiscence which had no heat, — for desire, once at the boiling-point, had now stiffened like lava. His skin, brown as that of a mummy, was glued to his temples. His scanty beard bristled among his wrinkles like stubble in the furrows. Godain never perspired, he reabsorbed his substance. His hairy hands, formed like claws, nervous, never still, seemed to be made of old wood. Though scarcely twenty-seven years of age, white lines were beginning to show in his rusty black hair. He wore a blouse, through the breast opening of which could be seen a shirt of coarse linen, so black that he must have worn it a month and washed it himself in the Thune. His sabots were mended with old iron. The original stuff of his trousers was unrecognizable from the darns and the infinite number of patches. On his head was a horrible cap, evidently cast off and picked up in the doorway of some bourgeois house in Ville-aux-Fayes.

Clearsighted enough to estimate the elements of good fortune that centred in Catherine Tonsard, his ambition was to succeed her father at the Grand-I-Vert. He made use of all his craftiness and all his actual powers to capture her; he promised her wealth, he also promised her the license her mother had enjoyed; besides this, he offered his prospective father-in-law an enormous rental, five hundred francs a year, for his inn, until he could buy him out, trusting to an agreement he had made with Monsieur Brunet to pay these costs by

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notes on stamped paper. By trade a journeyman tool-maker, this gnome worked for the wheelwrights when work was plentiful, but he also hired himself out for any extra labor which was well paid. Though he possessed, unknown to the whole neighborhood, eighteen hundred francs now in Gaubertin's hands, he lived like a beggar, slept in a barn, and gleaned at the harvests. He wore Gaubertin's receipt for his money sewn into the waist-belt of his trousers, — having it renewed every year with its own added interest and the amount of his savings.

"Hey! what do I care?" cried Nicolas, replying to Godain's prudent advice not to talk before Niseron. "If I'm doomed to be a soldier I 'd rather the sawdust of the basket sucked up my blood than have it dribbled out drop by drop in the battles. I 'll deliver this country of at least one of those Arminacs that the devil has launched upon us."

And he related what he called Michaud's plot against him, which Marie and Bonnébault had overheard.

"Where do you expect France to find soldiers?" said the white-haired old man, rising and standing before Nicolas during the silence which followed the utterance of this threat.

"We serve our time and come home again," remarked Bonnébault, twirling his moustache.

Observing that all the worst characters of the neighborhood were collecting, Père Niseron shook his head and left the tavern, after offering a farthing to Madame Tonsard in payment for his glass of wine. When the worthy man had gone down the steps a movement of relief and satisfaction passed through the assembled drinkers which would have told whoever watched them

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that each man in that company felt he was rid of the living image of his own conscience.

"Well, what do you say to all that, hey, Courtecuisse?" asked Vaudoyer, who had just come in, and to whom Tonsard had related Vatel's attempt.

Courtecuisse clacked his tongue against the roof of his mouth and set his glass on the table.

"Vatel put himself in the wrong," he said. "If I were Mother Tonsard, I'd give myself a few wounds and go to bed and say I was ill, and have that Shopman and his keeper up before the assizes and get twenty crowns damages. Monsieur Sarcus would give them."

"In any case the Shopman would give them to stop the talk it would make," said Godain.

Vaudoyer, the former field-keeper, a man five feet six inches tall, with a face pitted with the small-pox and furrowed like a nut-cracker, kept silence with a hesitating air.

"Well, you old ninny, does that ruffle you?" asked Tonsard, attracted by the idea of damages. "If they had broken twenty crowns' worth of my mother's bones we could turn it to good account; we might make a fine fuss for three hundred francs; Monsieur Gourdon would go to Les Aigues and tell them that the mother had got a broken hip —"

"And break it, too," interrupted Madame Tonsard; "they do that in Paris."

"It would cost too much," remarked Godain.

"I have been too long among the people who rule us to believe that matters will go as you want them," said Vaudoyer at last, remembering his past official intercourse with the courts and the gendarmerie. "If it were at Soulanges, now, it might be done; Monsieur

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Soudry represents the government there, and he does n't wish well to the Shopman; but if you attack the Shopman and Vatel they 'll defend themselves viciously; they 'll say, ' The woman was to blame; she had a tree, otherwise she would have let her bundle be examined on the highroad; she would n't have run away; if an accident happened to her it was through her own fault.' No, you can't trust to that plan."

"The Shopman did n't resist when I sued him," said Courtecuisse; "he paid me at once."

"I 'll go to Soulanges, if you like," said Bonnébault, "and consult Monsieur Gourdon, the clerk of the court, and you shall know to-night if *there 's money in it.*"

"You are only making an excuse to be after that big goose of a girl, Socquard's daughter," said Marie Tonsard, giving Bonnébault a slap on the shoulder that made his lungs hum.

Just then a verse of an old Burgundian Christmas carol was heard: —

"One fine moment of his life
Was at the wedding feast;
He changed the water into wine, —
Madeira of the best."

Every one recognized the vinous voice of old Fourchon, to whom the verse must have been peculiarly agreeable; Mouchon accompanied in his treble tones.

"Ha! they 're full!" cried old Mother Tonsard to her daughter-in-law; "your father is as red as a gridiron, and that chip o' the old block as pink as vine-shoot."

"Your healths!" cried the old man, "and a fine lot of scoundrels you are! All hail!" he said to his granddaughter, whom he spied kissing Bonnébault,

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"hail, Marie, full of vice! Satan is with thee; cursed art thou among women, etcetra. All hail, the company present! you are done for, every one of you! you may just say good-bye to your sheaves. I bring news. I always told you the rich would crush us; well now, the Shopman is going to have the law of you! Ha! see what it is to struggle against those bourgeois fellows, who have made so many laws since they got into power that they've a law to enforce every trick they play —"

A violent hiccough gave a sudden turn to the ideas of the distinguished orator.

"If Vermichel were only here I'd blow in his gullet, and he'd get an idea of sherry wine. Hey! what a wine it is! If I was n't a Burgundian I'd be a Spaniard! It's God's own wine! the pope says mass with it — Hey! I'm young again! Say, Courtecuisse! if your wife were only here we'd be young together. Don't tell me! Spanish wine is worth a dozen of boiled wine. Let's have a revolution if it's only to empty the cellars!"

"But what's your news, papa?" said Tonsard.

"There'll be no harvest for you; the Shopman has given orders to stop the gleaning."

"Stop the gleaning!" cried the whole tavern, with one voice, in which the shrill tones of the four women predominated.

"Yes," said Mouche, "he is going to issue an order, and Groison is to take it round, and post it up all over the canton. No one is to glean except those who have pauper certificates."

"And what's more," said Fourchon, "the folks from the other districts won't be allowed here at all."

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"What's that?" cried Bonnébault, "do you mean to tell me that neither my grandmother nor I, nor your mother, Godain, can come here and glean? Here's tomfoolery for you; a pretty show of authority! Why, the fellow is a devil let loose from hell, — that scoundrel of a mayor!"

"Shall you glean whether or no, Godain?" said Tonsard to the journeyman wheelwright, who was saying a few words to Catherine.

"I? I've no property; I'm a pauper," he replied; "I shall ask for a certificate."

"What did they give my father for his otter, bibi?" said Madame Tonsard to Mouche.

Though nearly at his last gasp from an over-taxed digestion and two bottles of wine, Mouche, sitting on Madame Tonsard's lap, laid his head on his aunt's neck and whispered slyly in her ear: —

"I don't know, but he has got gold. If you'll feed me high for a month, perhaps I can find out his hiding-place; he has one, I know that."

"Father's got gold!" whispered La Tonsard to her husband, whose voice was loudest in the uproar of the excited discussion, in which all present took part.

"Hush! here's Groison," cried the old sentinel.

Perfect silence reigned in the tavern. When Groison had got to a safe distance, Mother Tonsard made a sign, and the discussion began again on the question as to whether they should persist in gleaning, as before, without a certificate.

"You'll have to give in," said Père Fourchon; "for the Shopman has gone to see the prefect and get troops to enforce the order. They'll shoot you like dogs, — and that's what we are!" cried the old man, trying to

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conquer the thickening of his speech produced by his potations of sherry.

This fresh announcement, absurd as it was, made all the drinkers thoughtful; they really believed the government capable of slaughtering them without pity.

"I remember just such troubles near Toulouse, when I was stationed there," said Bonnébault. "We were marched out, and the peasants were cut and slashed and arrested. Everybody laughed to see them try to resist cavalry. Ten were sent to the galleys, and eleven put in prison; the whole thing was crushed. Hey! what? why, soldiers are soldiers, and you are nothing but civilian beggars; they've a right, they think, to sabre peasants, the devil take you!"

"Well, well," said Tonsard, "what is there in all that to frighten you like kids? What can they get out of my mother and my daughters? Put 'em in prison? well, then they must feed them; and the Shopman can't imprison the whole country. Besides, prisoners are better fed at the king's expense than they are at their own; and they're kept warmer, too."

"You are a pack of fools!" roared Fourchon. "Better gnaw at the bourgeois than attack him in front; otherwise, you'll get your backs broke. If you like the galleys, so be it, — that's another thing! You don't work as hard there as you do in the fields, true enough; but you don't have your liberty."

"Perhaps it would be well," said Vaudoyer, who was among the more valiant in counsel, "if some of us risked our skins to deliver the neighborhood of that Languedoc fellow who has planted himself at the gate of the Avonne."

"Do Michaud's business for him?" said Niçolas; "I'm good for that."

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"Things are not ripe for it," said old Fourchon. "We should risk too much, my children. The best way is to make ourselves look miserable and cry famine; then the Shopman and his wife will want to help us, and you 'll get more out of them that way than you will by gleaning."

"You are all blind moles," shouted Tonsard, "let 'em pick a quarrel with their law and their troops, they can't put the whole country in irons, and we 've plenty of friends at Ville-aux-Fayes and among the old lords who 'll sustain us."

"That 's true," said Courtecuisse; "none of the other land-owners complain, it is only the Shopman; Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Ronquerolles and others, they are satisfied. When I think that if that cuirassier had only had the courage to let himself be killed like the rest I should still be happy at the gate of the Avonne, and that it was he that turned my life topsy-turvy, it just puts me beside myself."

"They won't call out the troops for a Shopman who has set every one in the district against him," said Godain. "The fault 's his own; he tried to ride over everybody here, and upset everything; and the government will just say to him, 'Hush up.'"

"The government never says anything else; it can't, poor government!" said Fourchon, seized with a sudden tenderness for the government. "Yes, I pity it, that good government; it is very unlucky, — it has n't a penny, like us; but that 's very stupid of a government that makes the money itself, very stupid! Ah! if I were the government — "

"But," cried Courtecuisse, "they tell me in Ville-aux-Fayes that Monsieur de Ronquerolles talked about our rights in the Assembly."

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"That's in Monsieur Rigou's newspaper," said Vaudoyer, who in his capacity of ex-field-keeper knew how to read and write; "I read it —"

In spite of his vinous tenderness, old Fourchon, like many of the lower classes whose faculties are stimulated by drunkenness, was following, with an intelligent eye and a keen ear, this curious discussion which a variety of asides rendered still more curious. Suddenly, he stood up in the middle of the room.

"Listen to the old one, he's drunk!" said Tonsard, "and when he is, he is twice as full of deviltry; he has his own and that of the wine —"

"Spanish wine, and that trebles it!" cried Fourchon, laughing like a satyr. "My sons, don't butt your head straight at the thing, — you're too weak; go at it sideways. Lay low, play dead; the little woman is scared. I tell you, the thing'll come to an end before long; she'll leave the place, and if she does the Shopman will follow her, for she's his passion. That's your plan. Only, to make 'em go faster, my advice is get rid of their counsellor, their support, our spy, our ape —"

"Who's that?"

"The damned abbé, of course," said Tonsard; "that hunter after sins, who thinks the host is food enough for us."

"That's true," cried Vaudoyer; "we were happy enough till he came. We ought to get rid of that eater of the good God, — he's the real enemy."

"Finikin," added Fourchon, using a nickname which the abbé owed to his prim and rather puny appearance, "might be led into temptation and fall into the power of some sly girl, for he fasts so much. Then if we could catch him in the act and drum him up with a good



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charivari, the bishop would be obliged to send him elsewhere. It would please old Rigou devilish well. Now if your daughter, Courtecuisse, would leave Auxerre — she's a pretty girl, and if she'd take to piety, she might save us all. Hey! ran tan plan! — "

"Why don't *you* do it?" said Godain to Catherine, in a low voice; "there'd be scuttles full of money to hush up the talk; and for the time being you'd be mistress here — "

"Shall we glean, or shall we not glean? that's the point," said Bonnébault. "I don't care two straws for your abbé, not I; I belong to Conches, where we haven't a black-coat to poke up our consciences."

"Look here," said Vaudoyer, "we had better go and ask Rigou, who knows the law, whether the Shopman can forbid gleaning, and he'll tell us if we've got the right of it. If the Shopman has the law on his side, well, then we must do as the old one says, — see about taking things sideways."

"Blood will be spilt," said Nicolas, darkly, as he rose after drinking a whole bottle of wine, which Catherine drew for him in order to keep him silent. "If you'd only listen to me you'd down Michaud; but you are miserable weaklings, — nothing but poor trash!"

"I'm not," said Bonnébault. "If you are all safe friends who'll keep your tongues between your teeth, I'll aim at the Shopman — Hey! how I'd like to put a plum through his bottle; would n't it avenge me on those cursed officers?"

"Tut! tut!" cried Jean-Louis Tonsard, who was supposed to be, more or less, Gaubertin's son, and who had just entered the tavern. This fellow, who was courting Rigou's pretty servant-girl, had succeeded his

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nominal father as clipper of hedges and shrubberies and other Tonsardial occupations. Going about among the well-to-do houses, he talked with masters and servants and picked up ideas which made him the man of the world of the family, the shrewd head. We shall presently see that in making love to Rigou's servant-girl, Jean-Louis deserved his reputation for shrewdness.

"Well, what have you to say, prophet?" said the innkeeper to his son.

"I say that you are playing into the hands of the rich folk," replied Jean-Louis. "Frighten the Aigues people to maintain your rights if you choose; but if you drive them out of the place and make them sell the estate, you are doing just what the bourgeois of the valley want, and it's against your own interest. If you help the bourgeois to divide the great estates among them, where's the national domain to be bought for nothing at the next Revolution? Wait till then, and you'll get your land without paying for it, as Rigou got his; whereas if you go and thrust this estate into the jaws of the rich folk of the valley, the rich folk will dribble it back to you impoverished and at twice the price they paid for it. You are working for their interests, I tell you; so does everybody who works for Rigou, — look at Courtecuisse."

The policy contained in this allocution was too deep for the drunken heads of those present, who were all, except Courtecuisse, laying by their money to buy a slice of the Aigues cake. So they let Jean-Louis harangue, and continued, as in the Chamber of Deputies, their private confabs with one another.

"Yes, that's so; you'll be Rigou's cats-paw!" cried Fourchon, who alone understood his grandson.

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Just then Langlumé, the miller of Les Aigues, passed the tavern. Madame Tonsard hailed him.

"Is it true," she said, "that gleaning is to be forbidden?"

Langlumé, a jovial little man, white with flour and dressed in grayish-white clothes, came up the steps and looked in. Instantly all the peasants became as sober as judges.

"Well, my children, I'm forced to answer yes, and no. None but the poor are to glean; but the measures they are going to take will turn out to your advantage."

"How so?" asked Godain.

"Why, they can prevent any but paupers from gleaning here," said the miller, winking in true Norman fashion; "but that does n't prevent you from gleaning elsewhere, — unless all the mayors do as the Blangy mayor is doing."

"Then it is true," said Tonsard, in a threatening voice.

"As for me," said Bonnébault, putting his foraging-cap over one ear and making his hazel stick whiz in the air, "I'm off to Conches to warn the friends."

And the Lovelace of the valley departed, whistling the tune of the martial song, —

"You who know the hussars of the Guard,
Don't you know the trombone of the regiment?"

"I say, Marie! he's going a queer way to get to Conches, that friend of yours," cried old Mother Tonsard to her granddaughter.

"He's after Aglaë!" said Marie, who made one bound to the door. "I'll have to thrash her once for all, that baggage!" she cried, viciously.

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"Come, Vaudoyer," said Tonsard, "go and see Rigou, and then we shall know what to do; he's our oracle, and his spittle don't cost anything."

"Another folly!" said Jean-Louis, in a low voice, "Rigou betrays everybody; Annette tells me so; she says he's more dangerous when he listens to you than other folks are when they bluster."

"I advise you to be cautious," said Langlumé. "The general has gone to the prefecture about your misdeeds, and Sibilet tells me he has sworn an oath to go to Paris and see the Chancellor of France and the King himself, and the whole pack of them if necessary, to get the better of his peasantry."

"His peasantry!" shouted every one.

"Ha, ha! so we don't belong to ourselves any longer?"

As Tonsard asked the question, Vaudoyer left the house to see Rigou.

Langlumé, who had already gone out, turned on the door-step, and answered: —

"Crowd of do-nothings! are you so rich that you think you are your own masters?"

Though said with a laugh, the meaning contained in the words was understood by all present, as horses understand the cut of a whip.

"Ran tan plan! masters indeed!" shouted old Fourchon. "I say, my lad," he added to Nicolas, "after your performance of this morning it's not my clarionet that you'll get between your thumb and four fingers!"

"Don't plague him, or he'll make you throw up your wine by a punch in the stomach," said Catherine, roughly.

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## XIII.

### A TYPE OF THE COUNTRY USURER.

STRATEGICALLY, Rigou's position at Blangy was that of a picket sentinel. He watched Les Aigues, and watched it well. The police have no spies comparable to those that serve hatred.

When the general first came to Les Aigues Rigou apparently formed some plans about him which Montcornet's marriage with a Troisville put an end to; he seems to have wished to patronize the new land-owner. In fact his intentions were so patent that Gaubertin thought best to let him into the secrets of the coalition against Les Aigues. Before accepting any part in the affair, Rigou determined, as he said, to put the general between two stools.

One day, after the countess was fairly installed, a little wicker carriage painted green entered the grand courtyard of the château. The mayor, who was flanked by his mayoress, got out and came round to the portico on the garden side. As he did so Rigou saw Madame la comtesse at a window. She, however, devoted to the bishop and to religion and to the Abbé Brossette, sent word by François that "Madame was out."

This act of incivility, worthy of a woman born in Russia, turned the face of the ex-Benedictine yellow. If the countess had seen the man whom the abbé told her was "a soul in hell who plunged into iniquity as

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into a bath in his efforts to cool himself," if she had seen his face then she might have refrained from exciting the cold, deliberate hatred felt by the liberals against the royalists, increased as it was in country-places by the jealousies of neighborhood, where the recollections of wounded vanity are kept constantly alive.

A few details about this man and his morals will not only throw light on his share of the plot, called "the great affair" by his two associates, but it will have the merit of picturing an extremely curious type of man, — one of those rural existences which are peculiar to France, and which no writer has hitherto sought to depict. Nothing about this man is without significance, — neither his house, nor his manner of blowing the fire, nor his ways of eating; his habits, morals, and opinions will vividly illustrate the history of the valley. This renegade serves to show the utility of democracy; he is at once its theory and its practice, its alpha and its omega, in short, its *summum*.

Perhaps you will remember certain masters of avarice pictured in former scenes of this comedy of human life: in the first place the provincial miser, Père Grandet of Saumur, miserly as a tiger is cruel; next Gobseck, the usurer, that Jesuit of gold, delighting only in its power, and relishing the tears of the unfortunate because gold produced them; then Baron Nucingen, lifting base and fraudulent money transactions to the level of State policy. Then, too, you may remember that portrait of domestic parsimony, old Hochon of Issoudun, and that other miser in behalf of family interests, little la Baudraye of Sancerre. Well, human emotions — above all, those of avarice — take on so many and diverse shades

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In the diverse centres of social existence that there still remains upon the stage of our comedy another miser to be studied, namely, Rigou, — Rigou, the miser-egoist; full of tenderness for his own gratifications, cold and hard to others; the ecclesiastical miser; the monk still a monk so far as he can squeeze the juice of the fruit called good-living, and becoming secular only to put a paw upon the public money. In the first place, let us explain the continual pleasure that he took in sleeping under his own roof.

Blangy — by that we mean the sixty houses described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan — stands on a rise of land to the left of the Thune. As all the houses are surrounded by gardens, the village is a very pretty one. Some houses are built on the banks of the stream. At the upper end of the long rise stands the church, formerly flanked by a parsonage, its apse surrounded, as in many other villages, by a graveyard. The sacrilegious Rigou had bought the parsonage, which was originally built by an excellent Catholic, Mademoiselle Choin, on land which she had bought for the purpose. A terraced garden, from which the eye looked down upon Blangy, Cerneux, and Soulanges standing between the two great seignorial parks, separated the late parsonage from the church. On its opposite side lay a meadow, bought by the last curate of the parish not long before his death, which the distrustful Rigou had since surrounded with a wall.

The ex-monk and mayor having refused to sell back the parsonage for its original purpose, the parish was obliged to buy a house belonging to a peasant, which adjoined the church. It was necessary to spend five thousand francs to repair and enlarge it and to enclose

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it in a little garden, one wall of which was that of the sacristy, so that communication between the parsonage and the church was still as close as it ever was.

These two houses, built on a line with the church, and seeming to belong to it by their gardens, faced a piece of open ground planted by trees, which might be called the square of Blangy, — all the more because the count had lately built, directly opposite to the new parsonage, a communal building intended for the mayor's office, the home of the field-keeper, and the quarters of that school of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, for which the Abbé Brossette had hitherto begged in vain. Thus, not only were the houses of the ex-monk and the young priest connected and yet separated by the church, but they were in a position to watch each other. Indeed, the whole village spied upon the abbé. The main street, which began at the Thune, crept tortuously up the hill to the church. Vineyards, the cottages of the peasantry, and a small grove crowned the heights.

Rigou's house, the handsomest in the village, was built of the large rubble-stone peculiar to Burgundy, imbedded in yellow mortar smoothed by the trowel, which produced an uneven surface, still further broken here and there by projecting points of the stone, which was mostly black. A band of cement, in which no stones were allowed to show, surrounded each window with a sort of frame, where time had made some slight, capricious cracks, such as appear on plastered ceilings. The outer blinds, of a clumsy pattern, were noticeable for their color, which was dragon-green. A few mosses grew among the slates of the roof. The type is that of Burgundian homesteads; the traveller will see thousands like it when visiting this part of France.

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A double door opened upon a passage, half-way down which was the well of the staircase. By the entrance was the door of a large room with three windows looking out upon the square. The kitchen, built behind and beneath the staircase, was lighted from the courtyard, which was neatly paved with cobble-stones and entered by a porte-cochère. Such was the ground-floor. The first floor contained three bedrooms, above them a small attic chamber.

A wood-shed, a coach-house, and a stable adjoined the kitchen, and formed two sides of a square around the courtyard. Above these rather flimsy buildings were lofts containing hay and grain, a fruit-room, and one servant's-chamber.

A poultry-yard, the stable, and a pigsty faced the house across the courtyard.

The garden, about an acre in size and enclosed by walls, was a true priest's garden; that is, it was full of wall-fruit and fruit-trees, grape-arbors, gravel-paths, closely trimmed box-trees, and square vegetable-patches, made rich with the manure from the stable.

Above the house was another enclosure, planted with trees, surrounded by a hedge, and large enough to pasture two cows, who lived there in all weathers.

Within, the large room, panelled in wainscot, was hung with old tapestry. The walnut furniture, brown with age and covered with stuffs embroidered in needlework, was in keeping with the wainscot and with the ceiling, which was also panelled. The latter had three projecting beams, but these were painted, and between them the space was plastered. The mantel, also in walnut, surmounted by a mirror in a most grotesque frame, had no other ornament than two brass eggs

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standing on a marble base, each of which opened in the middle; the upper half when turned over showed a socket for a candle. These candlesticks for two lights, festooned with chains (an invention of the reign of Louis XV.), were becoming rare. On a green and gold bracket fastened to the wall opposite to the window was a common but excellent clock. The curtains, which squeaked upon their rods, were at least fifty years old; their material, of cotton in a square pattern like that of mattresses, alternately pink and white, came from the Indies. A sideboard and dinner-table completed the equipment of the room, which was kept with extreme nicety.

At the corner of the fireplace was an immense sofa, Rigou's especial seat. In the angle, above a little *bonheur du jour*, which served him as a desk, and hanging to a common screw, was a pair of bellows, the origin of Rigou's fortune.

From this succinct description, in style like that of an auction sale, it will be easy to imagine that the bedrooms of Monsieur and Madame Rigou were limited to mere necessaries; yet it would be a mistake to suppose that such parsimony affected the essential excellence of those necessaries. For instance, the most fastidious of women would have slept well in Rigou's bed, with fine linen sheets, excellent mattresses, made luxurious by a feather-bed (doubtless bought for some abbé by a pious female parishioner) and protected from draughts by thick curtains. All the rest of Rigou's belongings were made comfortable for his use, as we shall see.

In the first place, he had reduced his wife, who could neither read, write, nor cipher, to absolute obedience. After having ruled her deceased master, the poor

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creature was now the servant of her husband; she cooked and did the washing, with very little help from a pretty girl named Annette, who was nineteen years old and as much a slave to Rigou as her mistress, and whose wages were thirty francs a year.

Tall, thin, and withered, Madame Rigou, a woman with a yellow face red about the cheek-bones, her head always wrapped in a colored handkerchief, and wearing the same dress all the year round, did not leave the house for two hours in a month's time, but kept herself in exercise by doing the hard work of a devoted servant. The keenest observer could not have found a trace of the fine figure, the Rubens coloring, the splendid lines, the superb teeth, the virginal eyes which first drew the attention of the Abbé Niseron to the young girl. The birth of her only daughter, Madame Soudry, Jr., had blighted her complexion, decayed her teeth, dimmed her eyes, and even caused the dropping of their lashes. It almost seemed as if the finger of God had fallen upon the wife of the priest. Like all well-to-do country house-wives, she liked to see her closets full of silk gowns, made and unmade, and jewels and laces which did her no good and only excited the sin of envy and a desire for her death in the minds of all the young women who served Rigou. She was one of those beings, half-woman, half-animal, who are born to live by instinct. This ex-beautiful Arsène was disinterested; and the bequest left to her by the late Abbé Niseron would be inexplicable were it not for the curious circumstance which prompted it, and which we give here for the edification of the vast tribe of expectant heirs.

Madame Niseron, the wife of the old republican

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sexton, always paid the greatest attention to her husband's uncle, the priest of Blangy; the forty or fifty thousand francs soon to be inherited from the old man of seventy would put the family of his only nephew into a condition of affluence which she impatiently awaited, for besides her only son (the father of La Péchina) Madame Niseron had a charming little daughter, lively and innocent, — one of those beings that seem perfected only because they are to die, which she did at the age of fourteen from "pale color," the popular name for chlorosis among the peasantry. The darling of the parsonage, where the child fluttered about her great uncle the abbé as she did in her home, bringing clouds and sunshine with her, she grew to love Mademoiselle Arsène, the pretty servant whom the old abbé engaged in 1789. Arsène was the niece of his housekeeper, whose place the girl took by request of the latter on her deathbed.

In 1791, just about the time that the Abbé Niseron offered his house as an asylum to Rigou and his brother Jean, the little girl played one of her mischievous but innocent tricks. She was playing with Arsène and some other children at a game which consists in hiding an object which the rest seek, and crying out, "You burn!" or "You freeze!" according as the searchers approach or leave the hidden article. Little Geneviève took it into her head to hide the bellows in Arsène's bed. The bellows could not be found, and the game came to an end; Geneviève was taken home by her mother and forgot to put the bellows back on the nail. Arsène and her aunt searched more than a week for them; then they stopped searching and managed to do without them, the old abbé blowing his fire with

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an air-cane made in the days when air-canes were the fashion, — a fashion which was no doubt introduced by some courtier of the reign of Henri III. At last, about a month before her death, the housekeeper, after a dinner at which the Abbé Mouchon, the Niseron family, and the curate of Soulanges were present, returned to her jeremiades about the loss of the bellows.

"Why! they 've been these two weeks in Arsène's bed!" cried the little one, with a peal of laughter. "Great lazy thing! if she had taken the trouble to make her bed she would have found them."

As it was 1791 everybody laughed; but a dead silence succeeded the laugh.

"There is nothing laughable in that," said the housekeeper; "since I have been ill Arsène sleeps in my room."

In spite of this explanation the Abbé Niseron looked thunderbolts at Madame Niseron and his nephew, thinking they were plotting mischief against him. The housekeeper died. Rigou contrived to work up the abbé's resentment to such a pitch that he made a will disinheriting Jean-François Niseron in favor of Arsène Pichard.

In 1823 Rigou, perhaps out of a sense of gratitude, still blew the fire with an air-cane, and left the bellows hanging to the screw.

Madame Niseron, idolizing her daughter, did not long survive her. Mother and child died in 1794. The old abbé, too, was dead, and citizen Rigou took charge of Arsène's affairs by marrying her. A former convert in the monastery, attached to Rigou as a dog is to his master, became the groom, gardener, herds-

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man, valet, and steward of the sensual Harpagon. Arsène Rigou, the daughter, married in 1821 without dowry to the prosecuting-attorney, inherited something of her mother's rather vulgar beauty, together with the crafty mind of her father.

Now about sixty-seven years of age, Rigou had never been ill in his life, and nothing seemed able to lessen his aggressively good health. Tall, lean, with brown circles round his eyes, the lids of which were nearly black, any one who saw him of a morning, when as he dressed he exposed the wrinkled, red, and granulated skin of his neck, would have compared him to a condor, — all the more because his long nose, sharp at the tip, increased the likeness by its sanguineous color. His head, partly bald, would have frightened phrenologists by the shape of its skull, which was like an ass's backbone, an indication of despotic will. His grayish eyes, half-covered by filmy, red-veined lids, were predestined to aid hypocrisy. Two scanty locks of hair of an undecided color overhung the large ears, which were long and without rim, a sure sign of cruelty, but cruelty of the moral nature only, unless where it means actual insanity. The mouth, very broad, with thin lips, indicated a sturdy eater and a determined drinker by the drop of its corners, which turned downward like two commas, from which drooled gravy when he ate and saliva when he talked. Heliogabalus must have been like this.

His dress, which never varied, consisted of a long blue surtout with a military collar, a black cravat, with waistcoat and trousers of black cloth. His shoes, very thick soled, had iron nails outside, and inside woollen linings knit by his wife in the winter evenings. An-

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nette and her mistress also knit the master's stockings. Rigou's name was Grégoire.

Though this sketch gives some idea of the man's character, no one can imagine the point to which, in his private and unthwarted life, the ex-Benedictine had pushed the science of selfishness, good living, and sensuality. In the first place, he dined alone, waited upon by his wife and Annette, who themselves dined with Jean in the kitchen, while the master digested his meal and disposed of his wine as he read "the news."

In the country the special names of journals are never mentioned; they are all called by the general name of "the news."

Rigou's dinner, like his breakfast and supper, was always of choice delicacies, cooked with the art which distinguishes a priest's housekeeper from all other cooks. Madame Rigou made the butter herself twice a week. Cream was a concomitant of many sauces. The vegetables came at a jump, as it were, from their frames to the saucepan. Parisians, who are accustomed to eat the fruits of the earth after they have had a second ripening in the sun of a city, infected by the air of the streets, fermenting in close shops, and watered from time to time by the market-women to give them a deceitful freshness, have little idea of the exquisite flavors of really fresh produce, to which nature has lent fugitive but powerful charms when eaten as it were alive.

The butcher of Soulanges brought his best meat under fear of losing Rigou's custom. The poultry, raised on the premises, was of the finest quality.

This system of secret pampering embraced everything in which Rigou was personally concerned. Though the slippers of the knowing Thélémist were of stout leather

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they were lined with lamb's wool. Though his coat was of rough cloth it did not touch his skin, for his shirt, washed and ironed at home, was of the finest Frisian linen. His wife, Annette, and Jean drank the common wine of the country, the wine he reserved from his own vineyards; but in his private cellar, as well stocked as the cellars of Belgium, the finest vintages of Burgundy rubbed sides with those of Bordeaux, Champagne, Roussillon, not to speak of Spanish and Rhine wines, all bought ten years in advance of use and bottled by Brother Jean. The liqueurs in that cellar were those of the Isles, and came originally from Madame Amphoux. Rigou had laid in a supply to last him the rest of his days, at the national sale of a château in Burgundy.

The ex-monk ate and drank like Louis XIV. (one of the greatest consumers of food and drink ever known), which reveals the costs of a life that was more than voluptuous. Careful and very shrewd in managing his secret prodigalities, he disputed all purchases as only churchmen can dispute. Instead of taking infinite precautions against being cheated, the sly monk kept patterns and samples, had the agreements reduced to writing, and warned those who forwarded his wines or his provisions that if they fell short of the mark in any way he should refuse to accept their consignments.

Jean, who had charge of the fruit-room, was trained to keep fresh the finest fruits grown in the department; so that Rigou ate pears and apples and sometimes grapes, at Easter.

No prophet regarded as a God was ever more blindly obeyed than was Rigou in his own home. A mere mo-



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tion of his black eyelashes could plunge his wife, Annette, and Jean into the deepest anxiety. He held his three slaves by the multiplicity of their many duties, which were like a chain in his hands. These poor creatures were under the perpetual yoke of some ordered duty, with an eye always on them; but they had come to take a sort of pleasure in accomplishing these tasks, and did not suffer under them. All three had the comfort and well-being of that one man before their minds as the sole end and object of all their thoughts.

Annette was (since 1795) the tenth pretty girl in Rigou's service, and he expected to go down to his grave with relays of such servants. Brought to him at sixteen, she would be sent away at nineteen. All these girls, carefully chosen at Auxerre, Clamecy, or in the Morvan, were enticed by the promise of future prosperity; but Madame Rigou persisted in living. So at the end of every three years some quarrel, usually brought about by the insolence of the servant to the poor mistress, caused their dismissal.

Annette, who was a picture of delicate beauty, ingenuous and sparkling, deserved to be a duchess. Rigou knew nothing of the love affair between her and Jean-Louis Tonsard, which proves that he had let himself be fooled by the girl, — the only one of his many servants whose ambition had taught her to flatter the lynx as the only way to blind him.

This uncrowned Louis XV. did not keep himself wholly to his pretty Annette. Being the mortgagee of lands bought by peasants who were unable to pay for them, he kept a harem in the valley, from Soulanges to five miles beyond Conches on the road to La Brie, without making other payments than "extension of

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time," for those fugitive pleasures which eat into the fortunes of so many old men.

This luxurious life, a life like that of Bouret, cost Rigou almost nothing. Thanks to his white slaves, he could cut and mow down and gather in his wood, hay, and grain. To the peasant manual labor is a small matter, especially if it serves to postpone the payment of interest due. And so Rigou, while requiring little premiums on each month's delay, squeezed a great deal of manual labor out of his debtors, — positive drudgery, to which they submitted thinking they gave little because nothing left their pockets. Rigou sometimes obtained in this way more than the principal of a debt.

Deep as a monk, silent as a Benedictine in the throes of writing history, sly as a priest, deceitful as all misers, carefully keeping within the limits of the law, the man might have been Tiberius in Rome, Richelieu under Louis XIII., or Fouché, had the ambition seized him to go to the Convention; but, instead of all that, Rigou had the common sense to remain a Lucullus without ostentation, in other words, a parsimonious voluptuary. To occupy his mind he indulged a hatred manufactured out of the whole cloth. He harassed the Comte de Montcornet. He worked the peasants like puppets by hidden wires, the handling of which amused him as though it were a game of chess where the pawns were alive, the knights caracoled, the bishops, like Fourchon, gabbled, the feudal castles shone in the sun, and the queen maliciously checkmated the king. Every day, when he got out of bed and saw from his window the proud towers of Les Aigues, the chimneys of the pavilions, and the noble gates, he said to himself: "They shall fall! I'll dry up the brooks, I'll chop down the

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woods." But he had two victims in mind, a chief one and a lesser one. Though he meditated the dismemberment of the château, the apostate also intended to make an end of the Abbé Brossette by pin-pricks.

To complete the portrait of the ex-priest it will suffice to add that he went to mass regretting that his wife still lived, and expressed the desire to be reconciled with the Church as soon as he became a widower. He bowed deferentially to the Abbé Brossette whenever he met him, and spoke to him courteously and without heat. As a general thing all men who belong to the Church, or who have come out of it, have the patience of insects; they owe this to the obligation they have been under, ecclesiastically, to preserve decorum, — a training which has been lacking for the last twenty years to the vast majority of the French nation, even those who think themselves well-bred. All the monks which the Revolution brought out of their monasteries and forced into business, public or private, showed in their coldness and reserve the great advantage which ecclesiastical discipline gives to the sons of the Church, even those who desert her.

Gaubertin had understood Rigou from the days when the Abbé Niseron made his will and the ex-monk married the heiress; he fathomed the craft hidden behind the jaundiced face of that accomplished hypocrite; and he made himself the man's fellow-worshipper before the altar of the Golden Calf. When the banking-house of Leclercq was first started he advised Rigou to put fifty thousand francs into it, guaranteeing their security himself. Rigou was all the more desirable as an investor, or sleeping partner, because he drew no interest but allowed his capital to accumulate. At the period

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of which we write it amounted to over a hundred thousand francs, although in 1816 he had taken out one hundred and eighty thousand for investment in the Public Funds, from which he derived an income of seventeen thousand francs. Lupin the notary had cognizance of at least one hundred thousand francs which Rigou had lent on small mortgages upon good estates. Ostensibly, Rigou derived about fourteen thousand francs a year from landed property actually owned by him. But as to his amassed hoard, it was represented by an $x$ which no rule of equations could evolve, just as the devil alone knew the secret schemes he plotted with Langlumé.

This dangerous usurer, who proposed to live a score of years longer, had established fixed rules to work upon. He lent nothing to a peasant who bought less than seven acres, and who could not pay one-half of the purchase-money down. Rigou well understood the defects of the law of dispossession when applied to small holdings, and the danger both to the Public Treasury and to land-owners of the minute parcelling out of the soil. How can you sue a peasant for the value of one row of vines when he owns only five? The bird's-eye view of self-interest is always twenty-five years ahead of the perceptions of a legislative body. What a lesson for a nation! Law will ever emanate from one brain, that of a man of genius, and not from the nine hundred legislative heads, which, great as they may be in themselves, are belittled and lost in a crowd. Rigou's law contains the essential element which has yet to be found and introduced into public law to put an end to the absurd spectacle of landed property reduced to halves, quarters, tenths, hundredths, — as in the district of

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Argenteuil, where there are thirty thousand plots of land.

Such operations as those Rigou was concerned in require extensive collusion, like those we have seen existing in this arrondissement. Lupin, the notary, whom Rigou employed to draw at least one third of the deeds annually entrusted to his notarial office, was devoted to him. This shark could thus include in the mortgage note (signed always in presence of the wife, when the borrower was married) the amount of the illegal interest. The peasant, delighted to feel he had to pay only his five per cent interest annually, always imagined he should be able to meet the payment by working doubly hard or by improving the land and getting double returns upon it.

Hence the deceitful hopes excited by what imbecile economists call "small farming," — a political blunder to which we owe such mistakes as sending French money to Germany to buy horses which our own land has ceased to breed; a blunder which before long will reduce the raising of cattle until meat will be unattainable not only by the people, but by the lower middle classes (see "Le Curé de Village.")

So, not a little sweat bedewed men's brows between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes to Rigou's profit, all being willing to give it; whereas the labor dearly paid for by the general, the only man who did spend money in the district, brought him curses and hatred, which were showered upon him simply because he was rich. How could such facts be understood unless we had previously taken that rapid glance at the Mediocracy. Fourchon was right; the middle classes now held the position of the former lords. The small land-owners,

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of whom Courtecuisse is a type, were tenants in mortmain of a Tiberius in the valley of the Avonne, just as, in Paris, traders without money are the peasantry of the banking system.

Soudry followed Rigou's example from Soulanges to a distance of fifteen miles beyond Ville-aux-Fayes. These two usurers shared the district between them.

Gaubertin, whose rapacity was in a higher sphere, not only did not compete against that of his associates, but he prevented all other capital in Ville-aux-Fayes from being employed in the same fruitful manner. It is easy to imagine what immense influence this triumvirate — Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin — wielded in election periods over electors whose fortunes depended on their good-will.

Hate, intelligence, and means at command, such were the three sides of the terrible triangle which describes the general's closest enemy, the spy ever watching Les Aigues, — a shark having constant dealings with sixty to eighty small land-owners, relations or connections of the peasantry, who feared him as such men always fear their creditor.

Rigou was in his way another Tonsard. The one throve on thefts from nature, the other waxed fat on legal plunder. Both liked to live well. It was the same nature in two species, — the one natural, the other whetted by his training in a cloister.

It was about four o'clock when Vaudoyer left the tavern of the Grand-I-Vert to consult the former mayor. Rigou was at dinner. Finding the front door locked, Vaudoyer looked above the window blinds and called out: —

"Monsieur Rigou, it is I, — Vaudoyer."

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Jean came round from the porte-cochère and said to Vaudoyer: —

"Come into the garden; Monsieur has company."

The company was Sibilet, who, under pretext of discussing the verdict Brunet had just handed in, was talking to Rigou of quite other matters. He had found the usurer finishing his dessert. On a square dinner-table covered with a dazzling white cloth — for, regardless of his wife and Annette who did the washing, Rigou exacted clean table-linen every day — the steward noted strawberries, apricots, peaches, figs, and almonds, all the fruits of the season in profusion, served in white porcelain dishes on vine-leaves as daintily as at Les Aigues.

Seeing Sibilet, Rigou told him to run the bolts of the inside double-doors, which were added to the other doors as much to stifle sounds as to keep out the cold air, and asked him what pressing business brought him there in broad daylight when it was so much safer to confer together at night.

"The Shopman talks of going to Paris to see the Keeper of the Seals; he is capable of doing you a great deal of harm; he may ask for the dismissal of your son-in-law, and the removal of the judges at Ville-aux-Fayes, especially after reading the verdict just rendered in your favor. He has turned at bay; he is shrewd, and he has an adviser in that abbé, who is quite able to tilt with you and Gaubertin. Priests are powerful. Monseigneur the bishop thinks a great deal of the Abbé Brossette. Madame la comtesse talks of going herself to her cousin the prefect, the Comte de Castéran, about Nicolas. Michaud begins to see into our game."

"You are frightened," said Rigou, softly, casting a

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*"Seeing Sibilet, Rigou told him to run the bolts of the inside double-doors."*

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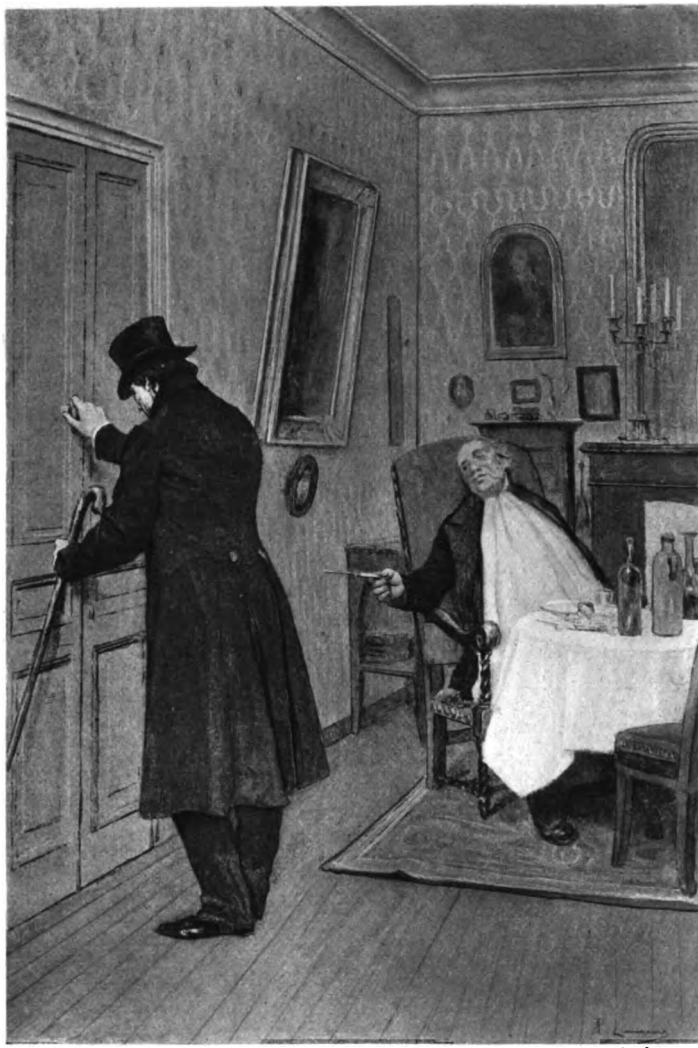

A. F. Laurens

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look on Sibilet which suspicion made less impassive than usual, and which was therefore terrific. "You are debating whether it would not be better on the whole to side with the Comte de Montcornet."

"I don't see where I am to get the four thousand francs I save honestly and invest every year, after you have cut up and sold Les Aigues," said Sibilet, shortly. "Monsieur Gaubertin has made me many fine promises; but the crisis is coming on; there will be fighting, surely. Promising before victory and keeping a promise after it are two very different things."

"I will talk to him about it," replied Rigou, imperturbably. "Meantime this is what I should say to you if I were in his place: 'For the last five years you have taken Monsieur Rigou four thousand francs a year, and that worthy man gives you seven and a half per cent; which makes your property in his hands at this moment over twenty-seven thousand francs, as you have not drawn the interest. But there exists a private signed agreement between you and Rigou, and the Shopman will dismiss his steward whenever the Abbé Brossette lays that document before his eyes; the abbé will be able to do so after receiving an anonymous letter which will inform him of your double-dealing. You would therefore do better for yourself by keeping well with us instead of clamoring for your pay in advance, — all the more because Monsieur Rigou, who is not legally bound to give you seven and a half per cent and the interest on your interest, will make you in court a legal tender of your twenty thousand francs, and you will not be able to touch that money until your suit, prolonged by legal trickery, shall be decided by the court at Ville-aux-Fayes. But if you act wisely you will find that

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when Monsieur Rigou gets possession of your pavilion at Les Aigues, you will have very nearly thirty thousand francs in his hands and thirty thousand more which the said Rigou may entrust to you, — which will be all the more advantageous to you then because the peasantry will have flung them themselves upon the estate of Les Aigues, divided into small lots like the poverty of the world.' That 's what Monsieur Gaubertin might say to you. As for me, I have nothing to say, for it is none of my business. Gaubertin and I have our own quarrel with that son of the people who is ashamed of his own father, and we follow our own course. If my friend Gaubertin feels the need of using you, I don't; I need no one, for everybody is at my command. As to the Keeper of the Seals, that functionary is often changed; whereas we — *we* are always here, and can bide our time."

"Well, I 've warned you," returned Sibilet, feeling like a donkey under a pack-saddle.

"Warned me of what?" said Rigou, artfully.

"Of what the Shopman is going to do," answered the steward, humbly. "He started for the Prefecture in a rage."

"Let him go! If the Montcornets and their kind did n't use wheels, what would become of the carriage-makers?"

"I shall bring you three thousand francs to-night," said Sibilet, "but you ought to make over some of your maturing mortgages to me, — say, one or two that would secure to me good lots of land."

"Well, there 's that of Courtecuisse. I myself want to be easy on him because he is the best shot in the canton; but if I make over his mortgage to you, you

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will seem to be harassing him on the Shopman's account, and that will be killing two birds with one stone; when Courtecuisse finds himself a beggar, like Fourchon, he 'll be capable of anything. Courtecuisse has ruined himself on the Bâchelerie; he has cultivated all the land, and trained fruit on the walls. The little property is now worth four thousand francs, and the count will gladly pay you that to get possession of the three acres that jut right into his land. If Courtecuisse were not such an idle hound he could have paid his interest with the game he might have killed there."

"Well, transfer the mortgage to me, and I 'll make my butter out of it; the count shall buy the three acres, and I shall get the house and garden for nothing."

"What are you going to give me out of it?"

"Good heavens! you 'd milk an ox!" exclaimed Sibilet, — "when I have just done you such a service, too. I have at last got the Shopman to enforce the laws about gleaning —"

"Have you, my dear fellow?" said Rigou, who a few days earlier had suggested this means of exasperating the peasantry to Sibilet, telling him to advise the general to try it. "Then we've got him; he's lost! But it is n't enough to hold him with one string; we must wind it round and round him like a roll of tobacco. Slip the bolts of the door, my lad; tell my wife to bring my coffee and the liqueurs, and tell Jean to harness up. I 'm off to Soulanges; will see you to-night! — Ah! Vaudoyer, good afternoon," said the late mayor as his former field-keeper entered the room. "What 's the news?"

Vaudoyer related the talk which had just taken place at the tavern, and asked Rigou's opinion as to the

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legality of the rules which the general thought of enforcing.

"He has the law with him," said Rigou, curtly. "We have a hard landlord; the Abbé Brossette is a malignant priest; he advises all such measures because you don't go to mass, you miserable unbelievers. I go; there 's a God, I tell you. You peasants will have to bear everything, for the Shopman will always get the better of you —"

"We shall glean," said Vaudoyer, in that determined tone which characterizes Burgundians.

"Without a certificate of pauperism?" asked the usurer. "They say the Shopman has gone to the Prefecture to ask for troops so as to force you to keep the law."

"We shall glean as we have always gleaned," repeated Vaudoyer.

"Well, glean then! Monsieur Sarcus will decide whether you have the right to," said Rigou, seeming to promise the help of the justice of the peace.

"We shall glean, and we shall do it in force, or Burgundy won't be Burgundy any longer," said Vaudoyer. "If the gendarmes have sabres we have scythes, and we 'll see what comes of it!"

At half-past four o'clock the great green gate of the former parsonage turned on its hinges, and the bay horse, led by Jean, was brought round to the front door. Madame Rigou and Annette came out on the steps and looked at the little wicker carriage, painted green, with a leathern hood, where their lord and master was comfortably seated on good cushions.

"Don't be late home, monsieur," said Annette, with a little pout.

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The village folk, already informed of the measures the general proposed to take, were at their doors or standing in the main street as Rigou drove by, believing that he was going to Soulanges in their defence.

"Well, Madame Courtecuisse, so our mayor is on his way to protect us," remarked an old woman as she knitted; the question of depredating in the forest was of great interest to her, for her husband sold the stolen wood at Soulanges.

"Ah! the good man, his heart bleeds to see the way we are treated; he is as unhappy as we are about it," replied the poor woman, who trembled at the very name of her husband's creditor, and praised him out of fear.

"And he himself, too, — they've shamefully ill-used him! Good-day, Monsieur Rigou," said the old knitter to the usurer, who bowed to her and to his debtor's wife.

As Rigou crossed the Thune, fordable at all seasons, Tonsard came out of the tavern and met him on the high-road.

"Well, Père Rigou," he said, "so the Shopman means to make dogs of us?"

"We'll see about that," said the usurer, whipping up his horse.

"He'll protect us," said Tonsard, turning to a group of women and children who were near him.

"Rigou is thinking as much about you as a cook thinks of the gudgeons he is frying in his pan," called out Fourchon.

"Take the clapper out of your throat when you are drunk," said Mouche, pulling his grandfather by the blouse, and tumbling him down on a bank under a pop-

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lar tree. "If that hound of a mayor heard you say that, he'd never buy any more of your tales.

The truth was that Rigou was hurrying to Soulanges in consequence of the warning given him by the steward of Les Aigues, which, in his heart, he regarded as threatening the secret coalition of the valley.

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# SECOND PART.

## I.

### THE LEADING SOCIETY OF SOULANGES.

About six kilometres (speaking legally) from Blangy, and at the same distance from Ville-aux-Fayes, on an elevation radiating from the long hillside at the foot of which flows the Avonne, stands the little town of Soulanges, surnamed La Jolie, with, perhaps, more right to that title than Mantes.

At the foot of the hill, the Thune broadens over a clay bottom to a space of some seventy acres, at the end of which the Soulanges mills, placed on numerous little islets, present as graceful a group of buildings as any landscape architect could devise. After watering the park of Soulanges, where it feeds various other streams and artificial lakes, the Thune falls into the Avonne through a fine broad channel.

The château of Soulanges, rebuilt under Louis XIV. from designs of Jules Mansart, and one of the finest in Burgundy, stands facing the town; so that Soulanges and its château mutually present to each other a charming and even elegant vista. The main road winds between the town and the pond, called by the country people, rather pompously, the lake of Soulanges.

The little town is one of those natural compositions which are extremely rare in France, where *prettiness* of

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its own kind is absolutely wanting. Here you would indeed find, as Blondet said in his letter, the charm of Switzerland, the prettiness of the environs of Neufchâtel; while the bright vineyards which encircle Soulanges complete the resemblance, — leaving out, be it said, the Alps and the Jura. The streets, placed one above another on the slope of the hill, have but few houses; for each house stands in its own garden, which produces a mass of greenery rarely seen in a town. The roofs, red or blue, rising among flower-gardens, trees, and trellised terraces, present an harmonious variety of aspects.

The church, an old Middle-Age structure, built of stone, thanks to the munificence of the lords of Soulanges, who reserved for themselves first a chapel near the chancel, then a crypt as their necropolis, has, by way of portal, an immense arcade, like that of the church at Lonjumeau, and is bordered by flower-beds adorned with statues, and flanked on either side by columns with niches, which terminate in spires. This portal, often seen in churches of the same period when chance has saved them from the ravages of Calvinism, is surmounted by a triglyph, above which stands a statue of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus. The sides of the structure are externally of five arches, defined by stone ribs and lighted by windows with small panes. The apse rests on arched abutments that are worthy of a cathedral. The clock-tower, placed in a transept of the cross, is square and surmounted by a belfry. The church can be seen from a great distance, for it stands at the top of the great square, at the lower end of which the high-road passes through the town.

This square, large for the size of the town, is sur-

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rounded by very original buildings, all of different epochs. Many, half-wood, half-brick, with their timbers faced with slate, date back to the Middle Ages. Others, of stone, with balconies, show the form of gable so dear to our ancestors, which belongs to the twelfth century. Several charm the eye with those old projecting beams, carved with grotesque faces, which form the roof of a sort of shed, and recall the days when the middle classes were exclusively commercial. The finest house among them was that of the chief magistrate of former days, — a house with a sculptured front on a line with the church, to which it forms a fine accompaniment. Sold as national property, it was bought in by the commune, which turned it into a town-hall and court-house, where Monsieur Sarcus had presided ever since the establishment of municipal judges.

This slight sketch will give an idea of the square of Soulanges, adorned in the centre with a charming fountain brought from Italy in 1520 by the Maréchal de Soulanges, which was not unworthy of a great capital. An unfailing jet of water, coming from a spring higher up the hill, was shed by four Cupids in white marble, bearing shells in their arms and baskets of grapes upon their heads.

Literary travellers who may pass this way (should any such follow Émile Blondet) might imagine the spot to have inspired Molière and the Spanish drama, which held its footing so long on French boards, showing that comedy is native to warm countries where so much of life is passed in the public streets. The square of Soulanges is all the more a reminder of that classic stage because the two principal streets, opening just on a line with the fountain, afford the exit and entrances so



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necessary for the dramatic masters and valets whose business it is either to meet or to avoid each other. At the corner of one of these streets, called the rue de la Fontaine, shone the notarial escutcheon of Maître Lupin. The houses of Messieurs Sarcus, Guerbet the collector, Brunet, Gourdon, clerk of the court, and that of his brother the doctor, also that of old Monsieur Gendrin-Vatebled, the keeper of the forests and streams, — all these houses, kept with extreme neatness by their owners, who held firmly to the flattering surname of their native town, stand in the neighborhood of the square and form the aristocratic quarter of Soulanges.

The house of Madame Soudry — for the powerful individuality of Mademoiselle Laguerre's former waiting-maid took the lead of her husband in the community — was modern, having been built by a rich wine merchant, born in Soulanges, who, after making his money in Paris, returned there in 1793 to buy wheat for his native town. He was slain as an "accapareur," a monopolist, by the populace, instigated by a mason, the uncle of Godain, with whom he had had some quarrel about the building of his ambitious house. The settlement of his estate, sharply contested by collateral heirs, dragged slowly along until, in 1798, Soudry, who had then returned to Soulanges, was able to buy the wine-merchant's palace for three thousand francs in specie. He then let it, in the first instance, to the government for the headquarters of the gendarmerie. In 1811 Mademoiselle Cochet, whom Soudry consulted about all his affairs, strongly objected to the renewal of the lease, making the house uninhabitable, she declared, with barracks. The town of Soulanges, assisted by the department, then erected a building for the gen-

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darmerie in a street running at right angles from the town-hall. Thereupon Soudry cleaned up his house and restored its primitive lustre, not a little dimmed by the stabling of horses and the occupancy of gendarmes.

The house, only one story high, with projecting windows in the roof, has a view on three sides; one to the square, another to a lake, the third to a garden. The fourth side looks on a courtyard which separates the Soudrys from the adjoining house occupied by a grocer named Wattebled, a man of the *second-class* society of Soulanges, father of the beautiful Madame Plissoud, of whom we shall presently have occasion to speak.

All little towns have a renowned beauty, just as they have a Socquard and a Café de la Paix.

It will be apparent to every one that the frontage of the Soudry mansion on the lake must have a terraced garden confined by a stone balustrade which overlooks both the lake and the main road. A flight of steps leads down from the terrace to the road, and on it an orange-tree, a pomegranate, a myrtle, and other ornamental shrubs are placed, necessitating a greenhouse. On the side toward the square the house is entered from a portico raised several steps above the level of the street. According to the custom of small towns the gate of the courtyard, used only for the service of the house or for any unusual arrival, was seldom opened. Visitors, who mostly came on foot, entered by the portico.

The style of the Hôtel Soudry is plain. The courses are indicated by projecting lines; the windows are framed by mouldings alternately broad and slender, like those of the Gabriel and Perronnet pavilion in the place

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Louis XV. These ornaments in so small a town give a certain solid and monumental air to the building which has become celebrated.

Opposite to this house, in another angle of the square stands the famous Café de la Paix, the characteristics of which, together with the fascinations of its Tivoli, will require, somewhat later, a less succinct description than that we have given of the Soudry mansion.

Rigou very seldom came to Soulanges; everybody was in the habit of going to him, — Lupin and Gaubertin, Soudry and Gendrin, — so much were they afraid of him. But we shall presently understand why any educated man, such as the ex-Benedictine, would have done as Rigou did, and kept away from the little town, after reading the following sketch of the personages who composed what was called in those parts "the leading society of Soulanges."

Of its principal figures, the most original, as you have already suspected, was that of Madame Soudry, whose personality, to be duly rendered, needs a minute and careful brush.

Madame Soudry, respectfully imitating Mademoiselle Laguerre, began by allowing herself a "mere touch of rouge;" but this delicate tint had changed through force of habit to those vermilion patches picturesquely described by our ancestors as "carriage-wheels." The wrinkles growing deeper and deeper, it occurred to the ex-lady's-maid to fill them up with paint. Her forehead becoming unduly yellow, and the temples too shiny, she "laid on" a little white, and renewed the veins of her youth with a tracery of blue. All this color gave an exaggerated liveliness to her eyes which were already tricksy enough, so that the mask of her face would seem

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to a stranger even more than fantastic, though her friends and acquaintance, accustomed to this fictitious brilliancy, actually declared her handsome.

This ungainly creature, always décolletée, showed a bosom and a pair of shoulders that were whitened and polished by the same process employed upon her face; happily, for the sake of exhibiting her magnificent laces, she partially veiled the charms of these chemical products. She always wore the body of her dress stiffened with whalebone and made in a long point and garnished with knots of ribbon, even on the point! Her petticoats gave forth a creaking noise, — so much did the silk and the furbelows abound.

This attire, which deserves the name of apparel (a word that before long will be inexplicable), was, on the evening in question, of costly brocade, — for Madame Soudry possessed over a hundred dresses, each richer than the others, the remains of Mademoiselle Laguerre's enormous and splendid wardrobe, made over to fit Madame Soudry in the last fashion of the year 1808. Her blond wig, frizzed and powdered, sustained a superb cap with knots of cherry satin ribbon matching those on her dress. If you will kindly imagine beneath this ultra-coquettish cap the face of a monkey of extreme ugliness, on which a flat nose, fleshless as that of Death, is separated by a strong hairy line from a mouth filled with false teeth, whence issue sounds like the confused clacking of hunting-horns, you will have some difficulty in understanding why the leading society of Soulanges (all the town, in fact) thought this quasi-queen a beauty, — unless, indeed, you remember the succinct statement recently made *ex professo*, by one of the cleverest women of our time,

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on the art of making her sex beautiful by surrounding accessories.

As to accessories, in the first place, Madame Soudry was surrounded by the magnificent gifts accumulated by her late mistress, which the ex-Benedictine called *fructus belli*. Then she made the most of her ugliness by exaggerating it, and by assuming that indescribable air and manner which belongs only to Parisian women, the secret of which is known even to the most vulgar among them, — who are always more or less mimics. She laced tight, wore an enormous bustle, also diamond earrings, and her fingers were covered with rings. At the top of her corsage, between two mounds of flesh well plastered with pearl-white, shone a beetle made of topaz with a diamond head, the gift of dear mistress, — a jewel renowned throughout the department. Like the late dear mistress, she wore short sleeves and bare arms, and flirted an ivory fan, painted by Boucher with two little rose-diamonds in the handle.

When she went out Madame Soudry carried a parasol of the true eighteenth-century style; that is to say, a tall cane at the end of which opened a green sun-shade with a green fringe. When she walked about the terrace a stranger on the high-road, seeing her from afar, might have thought her one of Watteau's dames.

In her salon, hung with red damask, with curtains of the same lined with white silk, a fire on the hearth, a mantel-shelf adorned with bibelots of the good time of Louis XV., and bearing candelabra in the form of lilies upheld by Cupids — in this salon, filled with furniture in gilded wood of the *pied de biche* pattern, it is not impossible to understand why the people of

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Soulanges called the mistress of the house, "The beautiful Madame Soulanges." The mansion had actually become the civic pride of this capital of a canton.

If the leading society of the little town believed in its queen, the queen as surely believed in herself. By a phenomenon not in the least rare, which the vanity of mothers and authors carries on at all moments under our very eyes in behalf of their literary works or their marriageable daughters, the late Mademoselle Cochet was, at the end of seven years, so completely buried under Madame Soudry, the mayoress, that she not only did not remember her past, but she actually believed herself a well-bred woman. She had studied the airs and graces, the dulcet tones, the gestures, the ways of her mistress, so long that when she found herself in the midst of an opulence of her own she was able to practice the natural insolence of it. She knew her eighteenth century, and the tales of its great lords and all their belongings, by heart. This back-stairs erudition gave to her conversation a flavor of *œil-de-bœuf*; her soubrette gossip passed muster for courtly wit. Morally, the mayoress was, if you wish to say so, tinsel; but to savages paste diamonds are as good as real ones.

The woman found herself courted and worshipped by the society in which she lived, just as her mistress had been worshipped in former days. She gave weekly dinners, with coffee and liqueurs to those who came in after the dessert. No female head could have resisted the exhilarating force of such continual adulation. In winter the warm salon, always well-lighted with wax candles, was well-filled with the richest people of

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Soulanges, who paid for the good liqueurs and the fine wines which came from dear mistress's cellars, with flatteries to their hostess. These visitors and their wives had a life-interest, as it were, in this luxury; which was to them a saving of lights and fuel. Thus it came to pass that in a circuit of fifteen miles and even as far as Ville-aux-Fayes, every voice was ready to declare: "Madame Soudry does the honors admirably. She keeps open house; every one enjoys her salon; she knows how to carry herself and her fortune; she always says the witty thing, she makes you laugh. And what splendid silver! There is not another house like it short of Paris —"

The silver had been given to Mademoiselle Laguerre by Bouret. It was a magnificent service made by the famous Germain, and Madame Soudry had literally stolen it. At Mademoiselle Laguerre's death she merely took it into her own room, and the heirs, who knew nothing of the value of their inheritance, never claimed it.

For some time past the twelve or fifteen personages who composed the leading society of Soulanges spoke of Madame Soudry as the *intimate friend* of Mademoiselle Laguerre, recoiling at the term "waiting-woman," and making believe that she had sacrificed herself to the singer as her friend and companion.

Strange yet true! all these illusions became realities, and spread even to the actual regions of the heart; Madame Soudry reigned supreme, in a way, over her husband.

The gendarme, required to love a woman ten years older than himself who kept the management of her fortune in her own hands, behaved to her in the spirit

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of the ideas she had ended by adopting about her beauty. But sometimes, when persons envied him or talked to him of his happiness, he wished they were in his place, for, to hide his peccadilloes, he was forced to take as many precautions as the husband of a young and adoring wife; and it was not until very recently that he had been able to introduce into the family a pretty servant-girl.

This portrait of the Queen of Soulanges may seem a little grotesque, but many specimens of the same kind could be found in the provinces at that period, — some more or less noble in blood, others belonging to the higher banking-circles, like the widow of a receiver-general in Touraine who still puts slices of veal upon her cheeks. This portrait, drawn from nature, would be incomplete without the diamonds in which it is set; without the surrounding courtiers, a sketch of whom is necessary, if only to explain how formidable such Liliputians are, and who are the makers of public opinion in remote little towns. Let no one mistake me, however; there are many localities which, like Soulanges, are neither hamlets, villages, nor little towns, which have, nevertheless, the characteristics of all. The inhabitants are very different from those of the large and busy and vicious provincial cities. Country life influences the manners and morals of the smaller places, and this mixture of tints will be found to produce some truly original characters.

The most important personage after Madame Soudry was Lupin, the notary. Though forty-five springs had bloomed for Lupin, he was still fresh and rosy, thanks to the plumpness which fills out the skin of sedentary persons; and he still sang ballads. Also, he

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retained the elegant evening dress of society warblers. He looked almost Parisian in his carefully-varnished boots, his sulphur-yellow waistcoats, his tight-fitting coats, his handsome silk cravats, his fashionable trousers. His hair was curled by the barber of Soulanges (the gossip of the town), and he maintained the attitude of a man *à bonne fortunes* by his liaison with Madame Sarcus, wife of Sarcus the rich, who was to his life, without too close a comparison, what the campaigns of Italy were to Napoleon. He alone of the leading society of Soulanges went to Paris, where he was received by the Soulanges family. It was enough to hear him talk to imagine the supremacy he wielded in his capacity as dandy and judge of elegance. He passed judgment on all things by the use of three terms: "out of date," "antiquated," "superannuated."[1] A man, a woman, or a piece of furniture might be "out of date;" next, by a greater degree of imperfection, "antiquated;" but as to the last term, it was the superlative of contempt. The first might be remedied, the second was hopeless, but the third, — oh, better far never to have left the void of nothingness! As to praise, a single word sufficed him, doubly and trebly uttered: "Charming!" was the positive of his admiration. "Charming, charming!" made you feel you were safe; but after "Charming, charming, charming!" the ladder might be discarded, for the heaven of perfection was attained.

The tabellion, — he called himself *tabellion*, petty notary, and keeper of notes (making fun of his calling in order to seem above it), — the tabellion was on

[1] *Croûte*, *croûton*, and *croûte-au-pot*, untranslatable, and without equivalent in English. A *croûte* is the slang term for a man behind the age. — Tr.

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terms of spoken gallantry with Madame Soudry, who had a weakness for Lupin, though he was blond and wore spectacles. Hitherto the late Cochet had loved none but dark men, with moustachios and hairy hands, of the Alcides type. But she made an exception in favor of Lupin on account of his elegance, and, moreover, because she thought her glory at Soulanges was not complete without an adorer; but, to Soudry's despair, the queen's adorers never carried their adoration so far as to threaten his rights.

Lupin's voice was a counter-tenor; he gave specimens of it occasionally in the corners of the salon or on the terrace, — just enough to remind the company of his talent for making himself agreeable, — a rock against which all agreeable men are apt to split, and, alas! men of genius also.

Lupin had married an heiress in wooden shoes and blue woollen stockings, the only daughter of a salt-dealer, who made his money during the Revolution, — a period when contraband salt-traders made enormous profits by reason of the reaction that set in against the gabelle. He prudently left his wife at home, where Bébelle, as he called her, was supported under his absence by a platonic passion for a handsome clerk who had no other means than his salary, — a young man named Bonnac, belonging to the second-class society, where he played the same *rôle* that his master, the notary, played in the first.

Madame Lupin, a woman without any education whatever, appeared on great occasions only, under the form of an enormous Burgundian barrel dressed in velvet and surmounted by a little head sunken in shoulders of a questionable color. No efforts could retain her waist-

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belt in its natural place. "Bébelle" candidly admitted that prudence forbade her wearing corsets. The imagination of a poet or, better still, that of an inventor, could not have found on Bébelle's back the slightest trace of that seductive sinuosity which the vertebræ of all women who are women usually produce. Bébelle, round as a tortoise, belonged to the genus of invertebrate females. This alarming development of cellular tissue no doubt reassured Lupin on the subject of the platonic passion of his fat wife, whom he boldly called Bébelle without raising a laugh.

"Your wife, what is she?" said Sarcus the rich, one day when unable to digest the fatal word "superannuated," applied to a piece of furniture he had just bought at a bargain.

"My wife is not like yours," replied Lupin; "she is not defined as yet."

Beneath his rosy exterior the notary possessed a subtle mind, and he had the sense to say nothing about his property, which was fully as large as that of Rigou.

Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, was a great trouble to his father. An only son, and one of the Don Juans of the valley, he utterly refused to follow the paternal profession. He took advantage of his position as only son to bleed the strong-box cruelly, without, however, exhausting the patience of his father, who would say after every escapade, "Well, I was like that in my young days." Amaury never came to Madame Soudry's; he said she bored him; for, with a recollection of her early days, she attempted to "educate" him, as she called it, whereas he much preferred the pleasures and billiards of the Café de la Paix. He frequented the worst com-

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pany of Soulanges, even down to Bonnébault. He continued sowing his wild oats, as Madame Soudry remarked, and replied to all his father's remonstrances with one perpetual request: "Send me back to Paris, for I am bored to death here."

Lupin ended, alas! like other gallants, by an attachment that was semi-conjugal. His known passion, in spite of his former liaison with Madame Sarcus, was for the wife of the under-sheriff of the municipal court, — Madame Euphémie Plissoud, daughter of Wattebled the grocer, who reigned in the second-class society as Madame Soudry did in the first. Monsieur Plissoud, a competitor of Brunet, belonged to the under-world of Soulanges on account of his wife's conduct, which it was said he authorized, — a report that drew upon him the contempt of the leading society.

If Lupin was the musician of the leading society, Monsieur Gourdon, the doctor, was its man of science. The town said of him, "We have here in our midst a scientific man of the first order." Madame Soudry (who believed she understood music because she had ushered in Piccini and Gluck and had dressed Mademoiselle Laguerre for the Opera) persuaded society, and even Lupin himself, that he might have made his fortune by his voice, and, in like manner, she was always regretting that the doctor did not publish his scientific ideas.

Monsieur Gourdon merely repeated the ideas of Cuvier and Buffon, which might not have enabled him to pose as a scientist before the Soulanges world; but besides this he was making a collection of shells, and he possessed an herbarium, and he knew how to stuff birds. He lived upon the glory of having bequeathed

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his cabinet of natural history to the town of Soulanges. After this was known he was considered throughout the department as a great naturalist and the successor of Buffon. Like a certain Genevese banker, whose pedantry, coldness, and puritan propriety he copied, without possessing either his money or his shrewdness, Monsieur Gourdon exhibited with great complacency the famous collection, consisting of a bear and a monkey (both of which died on their way to Soulanges), all the rodents of the department, mice and field-mice and dormice, rats, muskrats, and moles, etc.; all the interesting birds ever shot in Burgundy, and an Alpine eagle caught in the Jura. Gourdon also possessed a collection of lepidoptera, — a word which led society to hope for monstrosities, and to say, when it saw them, "Why, they are only butterflies!" Besides these things he had a fine array of fossil shells, mostly the collections of his friends which they bequeathed to him, and all the minerals of Burgundy and the Jura.

These treasures, laid out on shelves with glass doors (the drawers beneath containing the insects), occupied the whole of the first floor of the doctor's house, and produced a certain effect through the oddity of the names on the tickets, the magic effect of the colors, and the gathering together of so many things which no one pays the slightest attention to when seen in nature, though much admired under glass. Society took a regular day to go and look at Monsieur Gourdon's collection.

"I have," he said to all inquirers, "five hundred ornithological objects, two hundred mammifers, five thousand insects, three thousand shells, and seven thousand specimens of minerals."

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"What patience you have had!" said the ladies.

"One must do something for one's country," replied the collector.

He drew an enormous profit from his carcasses by the mere repetition of the words, "I have bequeathed everything to the town by my will." Visitors lauded his philanthropy; the authorities talked of devoting the second floor of the town hall to the "Gourdon Museum," after the collector's death.

"I rely upon the gratitude of my fellow-citizens to attach my name to the gift," he replied; "for I dare not hope they would place a marble bust of me —"

"It would be the very least we could do for you," they rejoined; "are you not the glory of our town?"

Thus the man actually came to consider himself one of the celebrities of Burgundy. The surest incomes are not from consols after all; those our vanity obtains for us have better security. This man of science was, to employ Lupin's superlatives, happy! happy!! happy!!!

Gourdon, the clerk of the court, brother of the doctor, was a pitiful little creature, whose features all gathered about his nose, so that the nose seemed the point of departure for the forehead, the cheeks, and the mouth, all of which were connected with it just as the ravines of a mountain begin at the summit. This pinched little man was thought to be one of the greatest poets in Burgundy, — a Piron, it was the fashion to say. The dual merits of the two brothers gave rise to the remark: "We have the brothers Gourdon at Soulanges, — two very distinguished men; men who would hold their own in Paris."

Devoted to the game of cup-and-ball, the clerk of the

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court became possessed by another mania, — that of composing an ode in honor of an amusement which amounted to a passion in the eighteenth century. Manias among mediocrats often run in couples. Gourdon junior gave birth to his poem during the reign of Napoleon. That fact is sufficient to show the sound and healthy school of poesy to which he belonged; Luce de Lancival, Parny, Saint-Lambert, Rouché, Vigée, Andrieux, Berchoux were his heroes. Delille was his god, until the day when the leading society of Soulanges raised the question as to whether Gourdon were not superior to Delille; after which the clerk of the court always called his competitor "Monsieur l'Abbé Delille," with exaggerated politeness.

The poems manufactured between 1780 and 1814 were all of one pattern, and the one which Gourdon composed upon the Cup-and-Ball will give an idea of them. They required a certain knack or proficiency in the art. "The Chorister" is the Saturn of this abortive generation of jocular poems, all in four cantos or thereabouts, for it was generally admitted that six would wear the subject threadbare.

Gourdon's poem entitled "Ode to the Cup-and-Ball" obeyed the poetic rules which governed these works, rules that were invariable in their application. Each poem contained in the first canto a description of the *object sung*, preceded (as in the case of Gourdon) by a species of invocation, of which the following is a model: —

> I sing the good game that belongeth to all,
> The game, be it known, of the Cup and the Ball;
> Dear to little and great, to the fools and the wise;
> Charming game! where the cure of all tedium lies;

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When we toss up the ball on the point of a stick
Palamedus himself might have envied the trick;
O Muse of the Loves and the Laughs and the Games,
Come down and assist me, for, true to your aims,
I have ruled off this paper in syllable squares.
Come, help me —

After explaining the game and describing the handsomest cup-and-balls recorded in history, after relating what fabulous custom it had formerly brought to the Singe-Vert and to all dealers in toys and turned ivories, and finally, after proving that the game attained to the dignity of statics, Gourdon ended the first canto with the following conclusion, which will remind the erudite reader of all the conclusions of the first cantos of all these poems: —

'T is thus that the arts and the sciences, too,
Find wisdom in things that seemed silly to you.

The second canto, invariably employed to depict the manner of using *the object*, explaining how to exhibit it in society and before women, and the benefit to be derived therefrom, will be readily conceived by the friends of this virtuous literature from the following quotation, which depicts the player going through his performance under the eyes of his chosen lady: —

Now look at the player who sits in your midst,
On that ivory ball how his sharp eye is fixt;
He waits and he watches with keenest attention,
Its least little movement in all its precision;
The ball its parabola thrice has gone round,
At the end of the string to which it is bound.
Up it goes! but the player his triumph has missed,
For the disc has come down on his maladroit wrist;
But little he cares for the sting of the ball,
A smile from his mistress consoles for it all.



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It was this delineation, worthy of Virgil, which first roused a doubt as to Delille's superiority over Gourdon. The word *disc*, contested by the opinionated Brunel, gave matter for discussions which lasted eleven months; in fact, until Gourdon the scientist, one evening when all present were on the point of getting seriously angry, annihilated the anti-discers by observing: —

"The moon, called a *disc* by poets, is undoubtedly a ball."

"How do you know that?" retorted Brunel. "We have never seen but one side."

The third canto told the regulation story, — in this instance, the famous anecdote of the cup-and-ball which all the world knows by heart, concerning a celebrated minister of Louis XVI. According to the sacred formula delivered by the "Débats" from 1810 to 1814, in praise of these glorious works, Gourdon's ode "borrowed fresh charms from poesy to embellish the tale."

The fourth canto summed up the whole, and concluded with these daring words, — not published, be it remarked, from 1810 to 1814; in fact, they did not see the light till 1824, after Napoleon's death: —

> 'T was thus that I sang in the time of alarms.
> Oh, if kings would consent to bear no other arms,
> And people enjoyed what was best for them all,
> The sweet little game of the Cup and the Ball,
> Our Burgundy then might be free of all fear,
> And return to the good days of Saturn and Rhea.

These fine verses were published in a first and only edition from the press of Bournier, printer of Ville-aux-Fayes. One hundred subscribers, in the sum of three francs, guaranteed the dangerous precedent of immortality to the poem, — a liberality that was all the greater

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because these hundred persons had heard the poem from beginning to end a hundred times over.

Madame Soudry had lately suppressed the cup-and-ball, which usually lay on a pier-table in the salon and for the last seven years had given rise to endless quotations, for she finally discovered in the toy a rival to her own attractions.

As to the author, who boasted of future poems in his desk, it is enough to quote the terms in which he mentioned to the leading society of Soulanges a rival candidate for literary honors.

"Have you heard a curious piece of news?" he had said, two years earlier. "There is another poet in Burgundy! Yes," he added, remarking the astonishment on all faces, "he comes from Maçon. But you could never imagine the subjects he takes up, — a perfect jumble, absolutely unintelligible, — lakes, stars, waves, billows! not a single philosophical image, not even a didactic effort! he is ignorant of the very meaning of poetry. He calls the sky by its name. He says 'moon,' bluntly, instead of naming it 'the planet of night.' That's what the desire to be thought original brings men to," added Gourdon, mournfully. "Poor young man! A Burgundian, and sing such stuff as that! — the pity of it! If he had only consulted me, I would have pointed out to him the noblest of all themes, wine, — a poem to be called the Baccheide; for which, alas! I now feel myself too old."

This great poet is still ignorant of his finest triumph (though he owes it to the fact of being a Burgundian), namely, that of living in the town of Soulanges, so rounded and perfected within itself that it knows nothing of the modern Pleiades, not even their names.

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A hundred Gourdons made poetry under the Empire, and yet they tell us it was a period that neglected literature! Examine the "Journal de la Librairie" and you will find poems on the game of draughts, on backgammon, on tricks with cards, on geography, typography, comedy, etc., — not to mention the vaunted masterpieces of Delille on Piety, Imagination, Conversation; and those of Berchoux on Gastromania and Dansomania, etc. Who can foresee the chances and changes of taste, the caprices of fashion, the transformations of the human mind? The generations as they pass along sweep out of sight the last fragments of the idols they found on their path and set up other gods, — to be overthrown like the rest.

Sarcus, a handsome little man with a dapple-gray head, devoted himself in turn to Themis and to Flora, — in other words, to legislation and a greenhouse. For the last twelve years he had been meditating a book on the History of the Institution of Justices of the Peace, "whose political and judiciary rôle," he said, "had already passed through several phases, all derived from the Code of Brumaire, year IV.; and to-day that institution, so precious to the nation, had lost its power because the salaries were not in keeping with the importance of its functions, which ought to be performed by irremovable officials." Rated in the community as an able man, Sarcus was the accepted statesman of Madame Soudry's salon; you can readily imagine that he was the leading bore. They said he talked like a book. Gaubertin prophesied he would receive the cross of the Legion of honor, but not until the day when, as Leclercq's successor, he should take his seat on the benches of the Left Centre.

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Guerbet, the collector, a man of parts, a heavy, fat, individual with a buttery face, a *toupet* on his bald spot, gold earrings, which were always in difficulty with his shirt-collar, had the hobby of pomology. Proud of possessing the finest fruit-garden in the arrondissement, he gathered his first crops a month later than those of Paris; his hot-beds supplied him with pine-apples, nectarines, and peas, out of season. He brought bunches of strawberries to Madame Soudry with pride when the fruit could be bought for ten sous a basket in Paris.

Soulanges possessed a pharmaceutist named Vermut, a chemist, who was more of a chemist than Sarcus was a statesman, or Lupin a singer, or Gourdon the elder a scientist, or his brother a poet. Nevertheless, the leading society of Soulanges did not take much notice of Vermut, and the second-class society took none at all. The instinct of the first may have led them to perceive the real superiority of this thinker, who said little but smiled at their absurdities so satirically that they first doubted his capacity and then whispered tales against it; as for the other class they took no notice of him one way or the other.

Vermut was the butt of Madame Soudry's salon. No society is complete without a victim, — without an object to pity, ridicule, despise, and protect. Vermut, full of his scientific problems, often came with his cravat untied, his waistcoat unbuttoned, and his little green surtout spotted.

The little man, gifted with the patience of a chemist, could not enjoy (that is the term employed in the provinces to express the abolition of domestic rule) Madame Vermut, — a charming woman, a lively woman, capital company (for she could lose forty sous at cards

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and say nothing), a woman who railed at her husband, annoyed him with epigrams, and declared him to be an imbecile unable to distil anything but dulness. Madame Vermut was one of those women who in the society of a small town are the life and soul of amusement and who set things going. She supplied the salt of her little world, kitchen-salt, it is true; her jokes were somewhat broad, but society forgave them; though she was capable of saying to the curé Taupin, a man of seventy years of age, with white hair, "Hold your tongue, my lad."

The miller of Soulanges, possessing an income of fifty thousand francs, had an only daughter whom Lupin desired for his son Amaury, since he had lost the hope of marrying him to Gaubertin's daughter. This miller, a Sarcus-Taupin, was the Nucingen of the little town. He was supposed to be thrice a millionaire; but he never transacted business with others, and thought only of grinding his wheat and keeping a monopoly of it; his most noticeable point was a total absence of politeness and good manners.

The elder Guerbet, brother of the post-master at Conches, possessed an income of ten thousand francs, besides his salary as collector.. The Gourdons were rich; the doctor had married the only daughter of old Monsieur Gendrin-Vatebled, keeper of the forests and streams, whom the family were now *expecting to die*, while the poet had married the niece and sole heiress of the Abbé Taupin, the curate of Soulanges, a stout priest who lived in his cure like a rat in his cheese.

This clever ecclesiastic, devoted to the leading society, kind and obliging to the second, apostolic to the poor and unfortunate, made himself beloved by the

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whole town. He was cousin of the miller and cousin of the Sarcuses, and belonged therefore to the neighborhood and to its mediocracy. He always dined out and saved expenses; he went to weddings but came away before the ball; he paid the costs of public worship, saying, "It is my business." And the parish let him do it, with the remark, "We have an excellent priest." The bishop, who knew the Soulanges people and was not at all misled as to the true value of the abbé, was glad enough to keep in such a town a man who made religion acceptable, and who knew how to fill his church and preach to sleepy heads.

It is unnecessary to remark that not only each of these worthy burghers possessed some one of the special qualifications which are necessary to existence in the provinces, but also that each cultivated his field in the domain of vanity without a rival. Père Guerbet understood finance, Soudry might have been minister of war; if Cuvier had passed that way incognito, the leading society of Soulanges would have proved to him that he knew nothing in comparison with Monsieur Gourdon the doctor. "Adolphe Nourrit with his thread of a voice," remarked the notary with patronizing indulgence, "was scarcely worthy to accompany the nightingale of Soulanges." As to the author of the "Cup-and-Ball" (which was then being printed at Bournier's), society was satisfied that a poet of his force could not be met with in Paris, for Delille was now dead.

This provincial bourgeoisie, so comfortably satisfied with itself, took the lead through the various superiorities of its members. Therefore the imagination of those who ever resided, even for a short time, in a

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little town of this kind can conceive the air of profound satisfaction upon the faces of these people, who believed themselves the solar plexus of France, all of them armed with incredible dexterity and shrewdness to do mischief, — all, in their wisdom, declaring that the hero of Essling was a coward, Madame de Montcornet a manœuvring Parisian, and the Abbé Brossette an ambitious little priest.

If Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin had lived at Ville-aux-Fayes, they would have quarrelled; their various pretensions would have clashed; but fate ordained that the Lucullus of Blangy felt too strongly the need of solitude, in which to wallow at his ease in usury and sensuality, to live anywhere but at Blangy; that Madame Soudry had sense enough to see she could reign nowhere except at Soulanges; and that Ville-aux-Fayes was Gaubertin's place of business. Those who enjoy studying social nature will admit that General Montcornet was pursued by special ill-luck in this accidental separation of his dangerous enemies, who thus accomplished the evolutions of their individual power and vanity at such distances from each other that neither star interfered with the orbit of the other, — a fact which doubled and trebled their powers of mischief.

Nevertheless, though all these worthy bourgeois, proud of their accomplishments, considered their society as far superior in attractions to that of Ville-aux-Fayes, and repeated with comic pomposity the local dictum, "Soulanges is a town of society and social pleasures," it must not be supposed that Ville-aux-Fayes accepted this supremacy. The Gaubertin salon ridiculed (*in petto*) the salon Soudry. By the manner in which Gaubertin remarked, "We are a financial

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community, engaged in actual business; we have the folly to fatigue ourselves in making fortunes," it was easy to perceive a latent antagonism between the earth and the moon. The moon believed herself useful to the earth, and the earth governed the moon. Earth and moon, however, lived in the closest intimacy. At the carnival the leading society of Soulanges went in a body to four balls given by Gaubertin, Gendrin, Leclercq, and Soudry, junior. Every Sunday the latter, his wife, Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Élise Gaubertin dined with the Soudrys at Soulanges. When the sub-prefect was invited, and when the postmaster of Conches arrived to take pot-luck, Soulanges enjoyed the sight of four official equipages drawn up at the door of the Soudry mansion.

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## II.

### THE CONSPIRATORS IN THE QUEEN'S SALON.

Reaching Soulanges about half-past five o'clock, Rigou was sure of finding the usual party assembled at the Soudrys'. There, as everywhere else in town, the dinner-hour was three o'clock, according to the custom of the last century. From five to nine the notables of Soulanges met in Madame Soudry's salon to exchange the news, make their political speeches, comment upon the private lives of every one in the valley, and talk about Les Aigues, which latter topic kept the conversation going for at least an hour every day. It was everybody's business to learn at least something of what was going on, and also to pay their court to the mistress of the house.

After this preliminary talk they played at boston, the only game the queen understood. When the fat old Guerbet had mimicked Madame Isaure, Gaubertin's wife, laughed at her languishing airs, imitated her thin voice, her pinched mouth, and her juvenile ways; when the Abbé Taupin had related one of the tales of his repertory; when Lupin had told of some event at Ville-aux-Fayes, and Madame Soudry had been deluged with compliments *ad nauseam*, the company would say: "We have had a charming game of boston."

Too self-indulgent to be at the trouble of driving over to the Soudrys' merely to hear the vapid talk of its visi-

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tors and to see a Parisian monkey in the guise of an old woman, Rigou, far superior in intelligence and education to this petty society, never made his appearance unless business brought him over to meet the notary. He excused himself from visiting on the ground of his occupations, his habits, and his health, which latter did not allow him, he said, to return at night along a road which led by the foggy banks of the Thune.

The tall, stiff usurer always had an imposing effect upon Madame Soudry's company, who instinctively recognized in his nature the cruelty of the tiger with steel claws, the craft of a savage, the wisdom of one born in a cloister and ripened by the sun of gold, — a man to whom Gaubertin had never yet been willing to fully commit himself.

The moment the little green carriole and the bay horse passed the Café de la Paix, Urbain, Soudry's man-servant, who was seated on a bench under the dining-room windows, and was gossipping with the tavern-keeper, shaded his eyes with his hand to see who was coming.

"It's Père Rigou," he said. "I must go round and open the door. Take his horse, Socquard." And Urbain, a former trooper, who could not get into the gendarmerie and had therefore taken service with Soudry, went round the house to open the gates of the courtyard.

Socquard, a famous personage throughout the valley, was treated, as you see, with very little ceremony by the valet. But so it is with many illustrious people who are so kind as to walk and to sneeze and to sleep and to eat precisely like common mortals.

Socquard, born a Hercules, could carry a weight of

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eleven hundred pounds; a blow of his fist applied on a man's back would break the vertebral column in two; he could bend an iron bar, or hold back a carriage drawn by one horse. A Milo of Crotona in the valley, his fame had spread throughout the department, where all sorts of foolish stories were current about him, as about all celebrities. It was told how he had once carried a poor woman and her donkey and her basket on his back to market; how he had been known to eat a whole ox and drink the fourth of a hogshead of wine in one day, etc. Gentle as a marriageable girl, Socquard, who was a stout, short man, with a placid face, broad shoulders, and a deep chest, where his lungs played like the bellows of a forge, possessed a flute-like voice, the limpid tones of which surprised all those who heard them for the first time.

Like Tonsard, whose renown released him from the necessity of giving proofs of his ferocity, in fact, like all other men who are backed by public opinion of one kind or another, Socquard never displayed his extraordinary muscular force unless asked to do so by friends. He now took the horse as the usurer drew up at the steps of the portico.

"Are you all well at home, Monsieur Rigou?" said the illustrious innkeeper.

"Pretty well, my good friend," replied Rigou. "Do Plissoud and Bonnébault and Viollet and Amaury still continue good customers?"

The question, uttered in a tone of good-natured interest, was by no means one of those empty speeches which superiors are apt to bestow upon inferiors. In his leisure moments Rigou thought over the smallest details of "the affair," and Fourchon had already warned him that there

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was something suspicious in the intimacy between Plissoud, Bonnébault, and the brigadier, Viollet.

Bonnébault, in payment of a few francs lost at cards, might very likely tell the secrets he heard at Tonsard's to Viollet; or he might let them out over his punch without realizing the importance of such gossip. But as the information of the old otter man might be instigated by thirst, Rigou paid no attention except so far as it concerned Plissoud, whose situation was likely to inspire him with a desire to counteract the coalition against Les Aigues, if only to get his paws greased by one or the other of the two parties.

Plissoud combined with his duties of under-sheriff other occupations which were poorly remunerated, that of agent for insurance (a new form of enterprise just beginning to show itself in France), agent, also, of a society providing against the chances of recruitment. His insufficient pay and a love of billiards and boiled wine made his future doubtful. Like Fourchon, he cultivated the art of doing nothing, and expected his fortune through some lucky but problematic chance. He hated the leading society, but he had measured its power. He alone knew the middle-class coalition organized by Gaubertin to its depths; and he continued to sneer at the rich men of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, as if he alone represented the opposition. Without money and not respected, he did not seem a person to be feared professionally, and so Brunel, glad to have a despised competitor, protected him and helped him along, to prevent his selling his business to some eager young man, like Bonnac for instance, who might force him, Brunel, to divide the patronage of the canton between them.

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"Thanks to those fellows, we keep the ball a-rolling," said Socquard. "But folks are trying to imitate my boiled wine."

"Sue them," said Rigou, sententiously.

"That would lead too far," replied the innkeeper.

"Do your clients get on well together?"

"Tolerably, yes; sometimes they 'll have a row, but that 's only natural for players."

All heads were at the window of the Soudry salon which looked to the square. Recognizing the father of his daughter-in-law, Soudry came to the portico to receive him.

"Well, comrade," said the mayor of Soulanges, "is Annette ill, that you give us your company of an evening?"

Through an old habit acquired in the gendarmerie Soudry always went direct to the point.

"No, — There 's trouble brewing," replied Rigou, touching his right fore-finger to the hand which Soudry held out to him. "I came to talk about it, for it concerns our children in a way —"

Soudry, a handsome man dressed in blue, as though he were still a gendarme, with a black collar, and spurs at his heels, took Rigou by the arm and led him up to his imposing better-half. The glass door to the terrace was open, and the guests were walking about enjoying the summer evening, which brought out the full beauty of the glorious landscape which we have already described.

"It is a long time since we have seen you, my dear Rigou," said Madame Soudry, taking the arm of the ex-Benedictine and leading him out upon the terrace.

"My digestion is so troublesome!" he replied; "see! my color is almost as high as yours."

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Rigou's appearance on the terrace was the sign for an explosion of jovial greetings on the part of the assembled company.

"And how may the lord of Blangy be?" said little Sarcus, justice of the peace.

"Lord!" replied Rigou, bitterly, "I am not even cock of my own village now."

"The hens don't say so, scamp!" exclaimed Madame Soudry, tapping her fan on his arm.

"All well, my dear master?" said the notary, bowing to his chief client.

"Pretty well," replied Rigou, again putting his forefinger into his interlocutor's hand.

This gesture, by which Rigou kept down the process of hand-shaking to the coldest and stiffest of demonstrations would have revealed the whole man to any observer who did not already know him.

"Let us find a corner where we can talk quietly," said the ex-monk, looking at Lupin and at Madame Soudry.

"Let us return to the salon," replied the queen.

"What has the Shopman done now?" asked Soudry, sitting down beside his wife and putting his arm about her waist.

Madame Soudry, like other old women, forgave a great deal in return for such public marks of tenderness.

"Why," said Rigou, in a low voice, to set an example of caution, "he has gone to the Prefecture to demand the enforcement of the penalties; he wants the help of the authorities."

"Then he's lost," said Lupin, rubbing his hands; "the peasants will fight."

"Fight!" cried Soudry, "that depends. If the prefect and the general, who are friends, send a

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squadron of cavalry the peasants can't fight. They might at a pinch get the better of the gendarmes, but as for resisting a charge of cavalry! — "

"Sibilet heard him say something much more dangerous than that," said Rigou; "and that 's what brings me here."

"Oh, my poor Sophie!" cried Madame Soudry, sentimentally, alluding to her *friend*, Mademoiselle Laguerre, "into what hands Les Aigues has fallen! This is what we have gained by the Revolution! — a parcel of swaggering epaulets! We might have foreseen that whenever the bottle was turned upside down the dregs would spoil the wine!"

"He means to go to Paris and cabal with the Keeper of the Seals and others to get the whole judiciary changed down here," said Rigou.

"Ha!" cried Lupin, "then he sees his danger."

"If they appoint my son-in-law attorney-general we can't help ourselves; the general will get him replaced by some Parisian devoted to his interests," continued Rigou. "If he gets a place in Paris for Gendrin and makes Guerbet chief-justice of the court at Auxerre, he 'll knock down our skittles! The gendarmerie is on his side now, and if he gets the courts as well, and keeps such advisers as the abbé and Michaud we shan't dance at the wedding; he 'll play us some scurvy trick or other."

"How is it that in all these five years you have never managed to get rid of that abbé?" said Lupin.

"You don't know him; he 's as suspicious as a blackbird," replied Rigou. "He is not a man at all, that priest; he does n't care for women; I can't find out that he has any passion; there 's no point at which

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one can attack him. The general lays himself open by his temper. A man with a vice is the servant of his enemies if they know how to pull its string. There are no strong men but those who lead their vices instead of being led by them. The peasants are all right; their hatred against the abbé keeps up; but we can do nothing as yet. He 's like Michaud, in his way; such men are too good for this world, — God ought to call them to himself."

"It would be a good plan to find some pretty servant-girl to scrub his staircase," remarked Madame Soudry. The words caused Rigou to give the little jump with which crafty natures recognize the craft of others.

"The Shopman has another vice," he said; "he loves his wife; we might get hold of him that way."

"We ought to find out how far she really influences him," said Madame Soudry.

"There 's the rub!" said Lupin.

"As for you, Lupin," said Rigou, in a tone of authority, "be off to the Prefecture and see the beautiful Madame Sarcus at once! You must get her to tell you all the Shopman says and does at the Prefecture."

"Then I shall have to stay all night," replied Lupin.

"So much the better for Sarcus the rich; he 'll be the gainer," said Rigou. "She is not yet out of date, Madame Sarcus —"

"Oh! Monsieur Rigou," said Madame Soudry, in a mincing tone, "are women ever out of date?"

"You may be right about Madame Sarcus; she does n't paint before the glass," retorted Rigou, who was always disgusted by the exhibition of the Cochet's ancient charms.



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Madame Soudry, who thought she used only a "suspicion" of rouge, did not perceive the sarcasm and hastened to say: —

"Is it possible that women paint?"

"Now, Lupin," said Rigou, without replying to this naiveté, "go over to Gaubertin's to-morrow morning. Tell him that my fellow-mayor and I" (striking Soudry on the thigh) "will break bread with him at breakfast somewhere about midday. Tell him everything, so that we may all have thought it over before we meet, for now's the time to make an end of that damned Shopman. As I drove over here I came to the conclusion it would be best to get up a quarrel between the courts and him, so that the Keeper of the Seals would be wary of making the changes he may ask in their members."

"Bravo for the son of the Church!" cried Lupin, slapping Rigou on the shoulder.

Madame Soudry was here struck by an idea which could come only to a former waiting-maid of an Opera divinity.

"If," she said, "one could only get the Shopman to the fête at Soulanges, and throw some fine girl in his way who would turn his head, we could easily set his wife against him by letting her know that the son of an upholsterer has gone back to the style of his early loves."

"Ah, my beauty!" said Soudry, "you have more sense in your head than the Prefecture of police in Paris."

"That's an idea which proves that Madame reigns by mind as well as by beauty," said Lupin, who was rewarded by a grimace which the leading society of Sou-

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langes were in the habit of accepting without protest for a smile.

"One might do better still," said Rigou, after some thought; "if we could only turn it into a downright scandal."

"Complaint and indictment! affair in the police court!" cried Lupin. "Oh! that would be grand!"

"Glorious!" said Soudry, candidly. "What happiness to see the Comte de Montcornet, grand cross of the Legion of honor, commander of the Order of Saint Louis, and lieutenant-general, accused of having attempted, in a public resort, the virtue — just think of it!"

"He loves his wife too well," said Lupin, reflectively. "He could n't be got to that."

"That's no obstacle," remarked Rigou; "but I don't know a single girl in the whole arrondissement who is capable of making a sinner of a saint. I have been looking out for one for the abbé."

"What do you say to that handsome Gatienne Giboulard, of Auxerre, whom Sarcus, junior, is mad after?" asked Lupin.

"That's the only one," answered Rigou, "but she is not suitable; she thinks she has only to be seen to be admired; she's not complying enough; we want a witch and a sly-boots, too. Never mind, the right one will turn up sooner or later."

"Yes," said Lupin, "the more pretty girls he sees the greater the chances are."

"But perhaps you can't get the Shopman to the fair," said the ex-gendarme. "And if he does come, will he go to the Tivoli ball?"

"The reason that has always kept him away from

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the fair does n't exist this year, my love," said Madame Soudry.

"What reason, dearest?" asked Soudry.

"The Shopman wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Soulanges," said the notary. "The family replied that she was too young, and that mortified him. That is why Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Montcornet, two old friends who both served in the Imperial Guard, are so cool to each other that they never speak. The Shopman does n't want to meet the Soulanges at the fair; but this year the family are not coming."

Usually the Soulanges party stayed at the château from July to October, but the general was then in command of the artillery in Spain, under the Duc d'Angoulême, and the countess had accompanied him. At the siege of Cadiz the Comte de Soulanges obtained, as every one knows, the marshal's bâton, which he kept till 1826.

"Very true," cried Lupin. "Well, it is for you, papa," he added, addressing Rigou, "to manœuvre the matter so that we can get him to the fair; once there, we ought to be able to entrap him."

The fair of Soulanges, which takes place on the 15th of August, is one of the features of the town, and carries the palm over all other fairs in a circuit of sixty miles, even those of the capital of the department. Ville-aux-Fayes has no fair, for its fête-day, the Saint-Sylvestre, happens in winter.

From the 12th to the 15th of August all sorts of merchants abounded at Soulanges, and set up their booths in two parallel lines, two rows of the well-known gray linen huts, which gave a lively appearance to the usually deserted streets. The two weeks of the fair brought in

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a sort of harvest to the little town, for the festival has the authority and prestige of tradition. The peasants, as old Fourchon said, flocked in from the districts to which labor bound them for the rest of the year. The wonderful show on the counters of the improvised shops, the collection of all sorts of merchandise, the coveted objects of the wants or the vanities of these sons of the soil, who have no other shows or exhibitions to enjoy, exercise a periodical seduction over the minds of all, especially the women and children. So, after the first of August the authorities posted advertisements signed by Soudry, throughout the whole arrondissement, offering protection to merchants, jugglers, mountebanks, prodigies of all kinds, and stating how long the fair would last, and what would be its principal attractions.

On these posters, about which it will be remembered Madame Tonsard inquired of Vermichel, there was always, on the last line, the following announcement:

"Tivoli will be illuminated with colored-glass lamps."

The town had adopted as the place for public balls a dance-ground created by Socquard out of a stony garden (stony, like the rest of the hill on which Soulanges is built, where the gardens are of made land), and called by him a Tivoli. This character of the soil explains the peculiar flavor of the Soulanges wine, — a white wine, dry and spirituous, very like Madeira or the Vouvray wine, or Johannisberger, — three vintages which resemble one another.

The powerful effect produced by the Socquard ball upon the imaginations of the whole country-side made the inhabitants thereof very proud of their Tivoli. Such as had ventured as far as Paris declared that the Parisian Tivoli was superior to that of Soulanges only

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in size. Gaubertin boldly declared that, for his part, he preferred the Socquard ball to the Parisian ball.

"Well, we 'll think it all over," continued Rigou. "That Parisian fellow, the editor of a newspaper, will soon get tired of his present amusement and be glad of a change; perhaps we could through the servants give him the idea of coming to the fair, and he 'd bring the others; I 'll consider it. Sibilet might — although, to be sure, his influence is devilishly decreased of late —but he might get the general to think he could curry popularity by coming."

"Find out if the beautiful countess keeps the general at arm's length," said Lupin; "that 's the point if you want him to fall into the farce at Tivoli."

"That little woman," cried Madame Soudry, "is too much of a Parisian not to know how to run with the hare and hold with the hounds."

"Fourchon has got his granddaughter Catherine on good terms, he tells me, with Charles, the Shopman's groom. That gives us one ear more in Les Aigues — Are you sure of the Abbé Taupin," he added, as the priest entered the room from the terrace.

"We hold him and the Abbé Moucheron, too, just as I hold Soudry," said the queen, stroking her husband's chin; "you are not unhappy, dearest, are you?" she said to Soudry.

"If I can plan a scandal against that Tartufe of a Brossette we can win," said Rigou, in a low voice. "But I am not sure if the local spirit can succeed against the Church spirit. You don't realize what that is. I, myself, who am no fool, I can 't say what I 'll do when I fall ill. I believe I shall try to be reconciled with the Church."

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"Suffer me to hope it," said the Abbé Taupin, for whose benefit Rigou had raised his voice on the last words.

"Alas! the wrong I did in marrying prevents it," replied Rigou. "I cannot kill off Madame Rigou."

"Meantime, let us think of Les Aigues," said Madame Soudry.

"Yes," said the ex-monk. "Do you know, I begin to think that our associate at Ville-aux-Fayes may be cleverer than the rest of us. I fancy that Gaubertin wants Les Aigues for himself, and that he means to trick us in the end."

"But Les Aigues will not belong to any one of us: it will have to come down, from roof to cellar," said Soudry.

"I should n't be surprised if there were treasure buried in those cellars," observed Rigou, cleverly.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, in the wars of the olden time the great lords, who were often besieged and surprised, did bury their gold until they should be able to recover it; and you know that the Marquis de Soulanges-Hautemer (in whom the younger branch came to an end) was one of the victims of the Biron conspiracy. The Comtesse de Moret received the property from Henri IV. when it was confiscated."

"See what it is to know the history of France!" said Soudry. "You are right. It is time to come to an understanding with Gaubertin."

"If he shirks," said Rigou, "we must smoke him out."

"He is rich enough now," said Lupin, "to be an honest man."

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"I'll answer for him as I would for myself," said Madame Soudry; "he's the most loyal man in the kingdom."

"We all believe in his loyalty," said Rigou, "but nevertheless nothing should be neglected, even among friends — By the bye, I think there is some one in Soulanges who is hindering matters."

"Who's that?" asked Soudry.

"Plissoud," replied Rigou.

"Plissoud!" exclaimed Soudry. "Poor fool! Brunel holds him by the halter, and his wife by the gullet; ask Lupin."

"What can he do?" said Lupin.

"He means to warn Montcornet," replied Rigou, "and get his influence and a place —"

"It would n't bring him in more than his wife earns for him at Soulanges," said Madame Soudry.

"He tells everything to his wife when he is drunk," remarked Lupin. "We shall know it all in good time."

"The beautiful Madame Plissoud has no secrets from you," said Rigou; "we may be easy about that."

"Besides, she's as stupid as she is beautiful," said Madame Soudry. "I would n't change with her; for if I were a man I'd prefer an ugly woman who has some mind, to a beauty who can't say two words."

"Ah!" said the notary, biting his lips, "but she can make others say three."

"Puppy!" cried Rigou, as he made for the door.

"Well, then," said Soudry, following him to the portico, "to-morrow, early."

"I'll come and fetch you — Ha! Lupin," he said to the notary, who came out with him to order his

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horse, "try to make sure that Madame Sarcus hears all the Shopman says and does against us at the Prefecture."

"If she does n't hear it, who will?" replied Lupin.

"Excuse me," said Rigou, smiling blandly, "but there are such a lot of ninnies in there that I forgot there was one clever man."

"The wonder is that I don't grow rusty among them," replied Lupin, naïvely.

"Is it true that Soudry has hired a pretty servant?"

"Yes," replied Lupin; "for the last week our worthy mayor has set the charms of his wife in full relief by comparing her with a little peasant-girl about the age of an old ox; and we can't yet imagine how he settles it with Madame Soudry, for, would you believe it, he has the audacity to go to bed early."

"I 'll find out to-morrow," said the village Sardanapalus, trying to smile.

The two plotters shook hands as they parted.

Rigou, who did not like to be on the road after dark for, notwithstanding his present popularity, he was cautious, called to his horse, "Get up, Citizen," — a joke this son of 1793 was fond of letting fly at the Revolution. Popular revolutions have no more bitter enemies than those they have trained themselves.

"Père Rigou's visits are pretty short," said Gourdon the poet to Madame Soudry.

"They are pleasant, if they are short," she answered.

"Like his own life," said the doctor; "his abuse of pleasures will cut that short."

"So much the better," remarked Soudry, "my son will step into the property."

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"Did he bring you any news about Les Aigues?" asked the Abbé Taupin.

"Yes, my dear abbé," said Madame Soudry. "Those people are the scourge of the neighborhood. I can't comprehend how it is that Madame de Montcornet, who is certainly a well-bred woman, does n't understand their interests better."

"And yet she has a model before her eyes," said the abbé.

"Who is that?" asked Madame Soudry, smirking.

"The Soulanges."

"Ah, yes!" replied the queen after a pause.

"Here I am!" cried Madame Vermut, coming into the room; "and without my re-active, — for Vermut is so inactive in all that concerns me that I can't call him an active of any kind."

"What the devil is that cursed old Rigou doing there?" said Soudry to Guerbet, as they saw the green chaise stop before the gate of the Tivoli. "He is one of those tiger-cats whose every step has an object."

"You may well say cursed," replied the fat little collector."

"He has gone into the Café de la Paix," remarked Gourdon, the doctor.

"And there 's some trouble there," added Gourdon the poet; "I can hear them yelping from here."

"That café," said the abbé, "is like the temple of Janus; it was called the Café de la Guerre under the Empire, and then it was peace itself; the most respectable of the bourgeoisie met there for conversation —"

"Conversation!" interrupted the justice of the peace. "What kind of conversation was it which produced all the little Bourniers?"

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"— but ever since it has been called, in honor of the Bourbons, the Café de la Paix, fights take place there every day," said Abbé Taupin, finishing the sentence which the magistrate had taken the liberty of interrupting.

This idea of the abbé was, like the quotations from "The Cup-and-Ball," of frequent recurrence.

"Do you mean that Burgundy will always be the land of fisticuffs?" asked Père Guerbet.

"That 's not ill said," remarked the abbé; "not at all; in fact it 's almost an exact history of our country."

"I don't know anything about the history of France," blurted Soudry; "and before I try to learn it, it is more important for me to know why old Rigou has gone into the Café de la Paix with Socquard."

"Oh!" returned the abbé, "wherever he goes and wherever he stays, you may be quite certain it is for no charitable purpose."

"That man gives me goose-flesh whenever I see him," said Madame Vermut.

"He is so much to be feared," remarked the doctor, "that if he had a spite against me I should have no peace till he was dead and buried; he would get out of his coffin to do you an ill-turn."

"If any one can force the Shopman to come to the fair, and manage to catch him in a trap, it 'll be Rigou," said Soudry to his wife, in a low tone.

"Especially," she replied, in a loud one, "if Gaubertin and you, my love, help him."

"There! did n't I tell you so?" cried Guerbet, poking the justice of the peace. "I knew he would find some pretty girl at Socquard's, — there he is, putting her into his carriage."

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"You are quite wrong, gentlemen," said Madame Soudry; "Monsieur Rigou is thinking of nothing but the great affair; and if I 'm not mistaken, that girl is only Tonsard's daughter."

"He is like the chemist who lays in a stock of vipers," said old Guerbet.

"One would think you were intimate with Monsieur Vermut to hear you talk," said the doctor, pointing to the little apothecary, who was then crossing the square.

"Poor fellow!" said the poet, who was suspected of occasionally sharpening his wit with Madame Vermut; "just look at that waddle of his! and they say he is learned!"

"Without him," said the justice of the peace, "we should be hard put to it about post-mortems; he found poison in poor Pigeron's stomach so cleverly that the chemists of Paris testified in the court at Auxerre that they could n't have done better —"

"He did n't find anything at all," said Soudry; "but, as President Gendrin says, it is a good thing to let people suppose that poison will always be found —"

"Madame Pigeron was very wise to leave Auxerre," said Madame Vermut; "she was silly and wicked both. As if it were necessary to have recourse to drugs to annul a husband! Are not there other ways quite as sure, but innocent, to rid ourselves of that incumbrance? I would like to have a man dare to question my conduct! The worthy Monsieur Vermut does n't hamper me in the least, — but he has never been ill yet. As for Madame de Montcornet, just see how she walks about the woods and the hermitage with that journalist whom she brought from Paris at her own expense, and how she pets him under the very eyes of the general!"

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"At her own expense!" cried Madame Soudry. "Are you sure? If we could only get proof of it, what a fine subject for an anonymous letter to the general!"

"The general!" cried Madame Vermut, "he won't interfere with things; he plays his part."

"What part, my dear?" asked Madame Soudry.

"Oh! the paternal part."

"If poor little Pigeron had had the wisdom to play it, instead of harassing his wife, he 'd be alive now," said the poet.

Madame Soudry leaned over to her neighbor, Monsieur Guerbet, and made one of those apish grimaces which she had inherited from dear mistress, together with her silver, by right of conquest, and twisting her face into a series of them she made him look at Madame Vermut, who was coquetting with the author of "The Cup-and-Ball."

"What shocking style that woman has! what talk, what manners!" she said. "I really don't think I can admit her any longer into *our society*, — especially," she added, "when Monsieur Gourdon, the poet, is present."

"There 's social morality!" said the abbé, who had heard and observed all without saying a word.

After this epigram, or rather, this satire on the company, so true and so concise that it hit every one, the usual game of boston was proposed.

Is not this a picture of life as it is at all stages of what we agree to call society? Change the style, and you will find that nothing more and nothing less is said in the gilded salons of Paris.

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## III.

### THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX.

It was about seven o'clock when Rigou drove by the Café de la Paix. The setting sun, slanting its beams across the little town, was diffusing its ruddy tints, and the clear mirror of the lake contrasted with the flashing of the resplendent window-panes, which originated the strangest and most improbable colors.

The deep schemer, who had grown pensive as he revolved his plots, let his horse proceed so slowly that in passing the Café de la Paix he heard his own name banded about in one of those noisy disputes which, according to the Abbé Taupin, made the name of the establishment a gain-saying of its customary condition.

For a clear understanding of the following scene we must explain the topography of this region of plenty and of misrule, which began with the café on the square, and ended on the country road with the famous Tivoli where the conspirators proposed to entrap the general. The ground-floor of the café, which stood at the angle of the square and the road, and was built in the style of Rigou's house, had three windows on the road and two on the square, the latter being separated by a glass door through which the house was entered. The café had, moreover, a double door which opened on a side alley that separated it from the neighboring house (that of Vallet the Soulanges mercer), which led to an inside courtyard.

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The house, which was painted wholly in yellow, except the blinds, which were green, is one of the few houses in the little town which has two stories and an attic. And this is why: Before the astonishing rise in the prosperity of Ville-aux-Fayes the first floor of this house, which had four chambers, each containing a bed and the meagre furniture thought necessary to justify the term "furnished lodgings," was let to strangers who were obliged to come to Soulanges on matters connected with the courts, or to visitors who did not sleep at the château; but for the last twenty-five years these rooms had had no other occupants than the mountebanks, the merchants, the vendors of quack medicines who came to the fair, or else commercial travellers. During the fair-time they were let for four francs a day; and brought Socquard about two hundred and fifty francs, not to speak of the profits on the consumption of food which the guests took in his café.

The front of the house on the square was adorned with painted signs; on the spaces that separated the windows from the glass door billiard-cues were represented, lovingly tied together with ribbons, and above these bows were depicted smoking bowls of punch, the bowls being in the form of Greek vases. The words "Café de la Paix" were over the door, brilliantly painted in yellow on a green ground, at each end of which rose pyramids of tricolored billiard-balls. The window-sashes, painted green, had small panes of the commonest glass.

A dozen arbor-vitæ, which ought to be called café-trees, stood to the left and right in pots, and presented their usual pretentious and sickly appearance. Awnings, with which shopkeepers of the large cities protect their windows from the heat of the sun, were

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as yet an unknown luxury in Soulanges. The beneficent liquids in the bottles which stood on boards just behind the window-panes went through a periodic cooking. When the sun concentrated its rays through the lenticular knobs in the glass it boiled the Madeira, the syrups, the liqueurs, the preserved plums, and the cherry-brandy set out for show; for the heat was so great that Aglaë, her father, and the waiter were forced to sit outside on benches poorly shaded by the wilted shrubs, — which Mademoiselle kept alive with water that was almost hot. All three, father, daughter, and servant, might be seen at certain hours of the day stretched out there, fast asleep, like domestic animals.

In 1804, the period when "Paul and Virginia" was the rage, the inside of the café was hung with a paper which represented the chief scenes of that romance. There could be seen negroes gathering the coffee-crop, though coffee was seldom seen in the establishment, not twenty cups of that beverage being served in a month. Colonial products were of so little account in the consumption of the place that if a stranger had asked for a cup of chocolate Socquard would have been hard put to it to serve him. Still, he would have done so with a nauseous brown broth made from tablets in which there were more flour, crushed almonds, and brown sugar than pure sugar and cacao, concoctions which were sold at two sous a cake by village grocers, and manufactured for the purpose of ruining the sale of the Spanish commodity.

As for coffee, Père Socquard simply boiled it in a utensil known to all such households as the "big brown pot;" he let the dregs (that were half chicory) settle, and served the decoction, with a coolness worthy of a

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Parisian waiter, in a china cup which, if flung to the ground, would not have cracked.

At this period the sacred respect felt for sugar under the Emperor was not yet dispelled in the town of Soulanges, and Aglaë Socquard boldly served three bits of it of the size of hazel-nuts to a foreign merchant who had rashly asked for the literary beverage.

The wall decoration of the café, relieved by mirrors in gilt frames and brackets on which the hats were hung, had not been changed since the days when all Soulanges came to admire the romantic paper, also a counter painted like mahogany with a Sainte-Anne marble top, on which shone vessels of plated metal and lamps with double burners, which were, rumor said, given to the beautiful Madame Socquard by Gaubertin. A sticky coating of dirt covered everything, like that found on old pictures put away and long forgotten in a garret. The tables painted to resemble marble, the benches covered with red Utrecht velvet, the hanging glass lamp full of oil, which fed two lights, fastened by a chain to the ceiling and adorned with glass pendants, were the beginning of the celebrity of the then Café de la Guerre.

There, from 1802 to 1804, all the bourgeois of Soulanges played at dominoes and a game of cards called "*brelan*," drank tiny glasses of liqueur or boiled wine, and ate brandied fruits and biscuits; for the dearness of colonial products had banished coffee, sugar, and chocolate. Punch was a great luxury; so was "*bavaroise*." These infusions were made with a sugary substance resembling molasses, the name of which is now lost, but which, at the time, made the fortune of its inventor.



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These succinct details will recall to the memory of all travellers many others that are analogous; and those persons who have never left Paris can imagine the ceiling blackened with smoke and the mirrors specked with millions of spots, showing in what freedom and independence the whole order of diptera lived in the Café de la Paix.

The beautiful Madame Socquard, whose gallant adventures surpassed those of the mistress of the Grand-I-Vert, sat there, enthroned, dressed in the last fashion. She affected the style of a sultana, and wore a turban. Sultanas, under the Empire, enjoyed a vogue equal to that of the "angel" of to-day. The whole valley took pattern from the turbans, the poke-bonnets, the fur caps, the Chinese head-gear of the handsome Socquard, to whose luxury the big-wigs of Soulanges contributed. With a waist beneath her arm-pits, after the fashion of our mothers, who were proud of their imperial graces, Junie (she was named Junie!) made the fortune of the house of Socquard. Her husband owed to her the ownership of a vineyard, of the house they lived in, and also the Tivoli. The father of Monsieur Lupin was said to have committed some follies for the handsome Madame Socquard; and Gaubertin, who had taken her from him, certainly owed him the little Bournier.

These details, together with the deep mystery with which Socquard manufactured his boiled wine, are sufficient to explain why his name and that of the Café de la Paix were popular; but there were other reasons for their renown. Nothing better than wine could be got at Tonsard's and the other taverns in the valley; from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, in a circumference of twenty miles, the Café Socquard was the only place

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where the guests could play billiards and drink the punch so admirably concocted by the proprietor. There alone could be found a display of foreign wines, fine liqueurs, and brandied fruits. Its name resounded daily throughout the valley, accompanied by ideas of superfine sensual pleasures such as men whose stomachs are more sensitive than their hearts dream about. To all these causes of popularity was added that of being an integral part of the great festival of Soulanges. The Café de la Paix was to the town, in a superior degree, what the tavern of the Grand-I-Vert was to the peasantry, — a centre of venom; it was the point of contact and transmission between the gossip of Ville-aux-Fayes and that of the valley. The Grand-I-Vert supplied the milk and the Café de la Paix the cream, and Tonsard's two daughters were in daily communication between the two.

To Socquard's mind the square of Soulanges was merely an appendage to his café. Hercules went from door to door, talking with this one and that one, and wearing in summer no other garment than a pair of trousers and a half-buttoned waistcoat. If any one entered the tavern, the people with whom he gossiped warned him, and he slowly and reluctantly returned.

Rigou stopped his horse, and getting out of the chaise, fastened the bridle to one of the posts near the gate of the Tivoli. Then he made a pretext to listen to what was going on without being noticed, and placed himself between two windows through one of which he could, by advancing his head, see the persons in the room, watch their gestures, and catch the louder tones which came through the glass of the windows and which the quiet of the street enabled him to hear.

"If I were to tell old Rigou that your brother Nicolas

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is after La Péchina," cried an angry voice, "and that he waylays her, he'd rip the entrails out of every one of you, — pack of scoundrels that you are at the Grand-I-Vert!"

"If you play me such a trick as that, Aglaë," said the shrill voice of Marie Tonsard, "you sha'n't tell anything more except to the worms in your coffin. Don't meddle with my brother's business or with mine and Bonnébault's either."

Marie, instigated by her grandmother, had, as we see, followed Bonnébault; she had watched him through the very window where Rigou was now standing, and had seen him displaying his graces and paying compliments so agreeable to Mademoiselle Socquard that she was forced to smile upon him. That smile had brought about the scene in the midst of which the revelation that interested Rigou came out.

"Well, well, Père Rigou, what are you doing here?" said Socquard, slapping the usurer on the shoulder; he was coming from a barn at the end of the garden, where he kept various contrivances for the public games, such as weighing-machines, merry-go-rounds, see-saws, all in readiness for the Tivoli when opened. Socquard stepped noiselessly, for he was wearing a pair of those yellow leather slippers which cost so little by the gross that they have an enormous sale in the provinces.

"If you have any fresh lemons, I'd like a glass of lemonade," said Rigou; "it is a warm evening."

"Who is making that racket?" said Socquard, looking through the window and seeing his daughter and Marie Tonsard.

"They are quarrelling for Bonnébault," said Rigou, sardonically.

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The anger of the father was at once controlled by the interest of the tavern-keeper. The tavern-keeper judged it prudent to listen outside, as Rigou was doing; the father was inclined to enter and declare that Bonnébault, possessed of admirable qualities in the eyes of a tavern-keeper, had none at all as son-in-law to one of the notables of Soulanges. And yet Père Socquard had received but few offers for his daughter. At twenty-two Aglaë already rivalled in size and weight Madame Vermichel, whose agility seemed phenomenal. Sitting behind a counter increased the adipose tendency which she derived from her father.

"What devil is it that gets into girls?" said Socquard to Rigou.

"Ha!" replied the ex-Benedictine, "of all the devils, that 's the one the Church has most to do with."

Just then Bonnébault came out of the billiard-room with a cue in his hand, and struck Marie sharply, saying: —

"You 've made me miss my stroke; but I 'll not miss you, and I 'll give it to you till you muffle that clapper of yours."

Socquard and Rigou, who now thought it wise to interfere, entered the café by the front door, raising such a crowd of flies that the light from the windows was obscured; the sound was like that of the distant practising of a drum-corps. After their first excitement was over, the big flies with bluish bellies, accompanied by the stinging little ones, returned to their quarters in the windows, where on three tiers of planks, the paint of which was indistinguishable under the fly-specks, were rows of viscous bottles ranged like soldiers.

Marie was crying. To be struck before a rival by the

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man she loves is one of those humiliations that no woman can endure, no matter what her place on the social ladder may be; and the lower that place is, the more violent is the expression of her wrath. The Tonsard girl took no notice of Rigou or of Socquard; she flung herself on a bench, in gloomy and sullen silence, which the ex-monk carefully watched.

"Get a fresh lemon, Aglaë," said Père Socquard, "and go and rinse that glass yourself."

"You did right to send her away," whispered Rigou, "or she might have been hurt;" and he glanced significantly at the hand with which Marie grasped a stool she had caught up to throw at Aglaë's head.

"Now, Marie," said Socquard, standing before her, "people don't come here to fling stools; if you were to break one of my mirrors, the milk of your cows would n't pay for the damage."

"Père Socquard, your daughter is a reptile; I 'm worth a dozen of her, I 'd have you know. If you don't want Bonnébault for a son-in-law, it is high time for you to tell him to go and play billiards somewhere else; he 's losing a hundred sous every minute."

In the middle of this flux of words, screamed rather than said, Socquard took Marie round the waist and flung her out of the door, in spite of her cries and resistance. It was none too soon; for Bonnébault rushed out of the billiard-room, his eyes blazing.

"It sha'n't end so!" cried Marie Tonsard.

"Begone!" shouted Bonnébault, whom Viollet held back round the body lest he should do the girl some hurt. "Go to the devil, or I will never speak to you or look at you again!"

"You!" said Marie, flinging him a furious glance.

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*"'Now, Marie,' said Socquard, standing before her, 'people don't come here to fling stools.'"*

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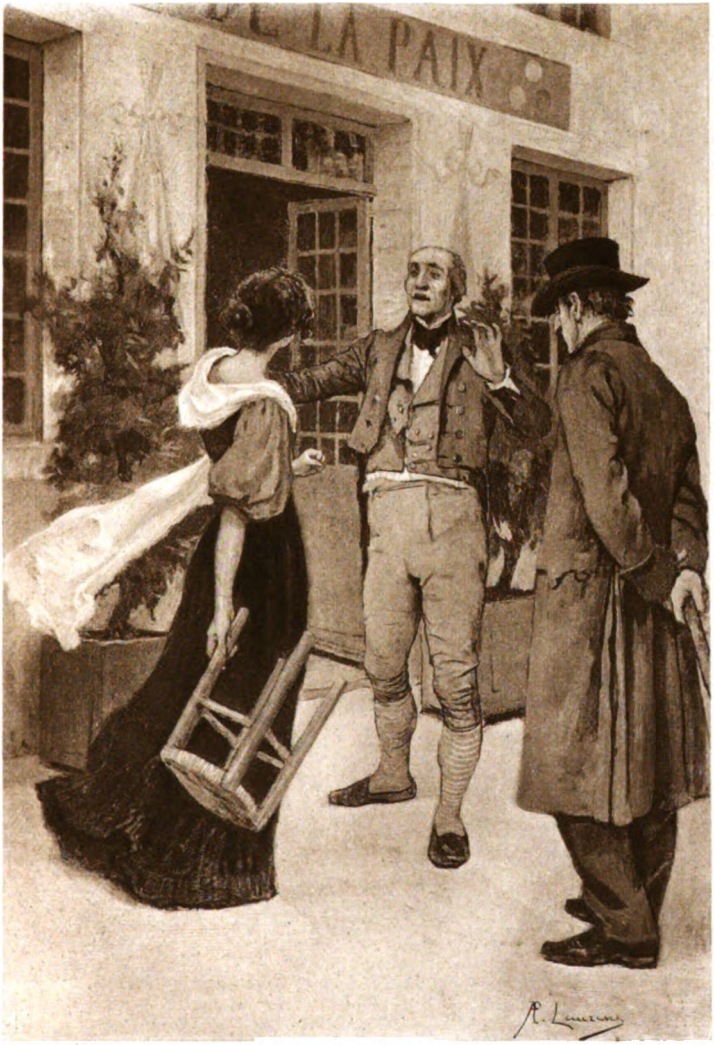


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"Give me back my money, and I 'll leave you to Mademoiselle Socquard if she is rich enough to keep you."

Thereupon Marie, frightened when she saw that even Socquard-Alcides could scarcely hold Bonnébault, who sprang after her like a tiger, took to flight along the road.

Rigou followed, and told her to get into his carriole to escape Bonnébault, whose shouts reached the hôtel Soudry; then, after hiding Marie under the leather curtains, he came back to the café to drink his lemonade and examine the group it now contained, composed of Plissoud, Amaury, Viollet, and the waiter, who were all trying to pacify Bonnébault.

"Come, hussar, it's your turn to play," said Amaury, a small, fair young man, with a dull eye.

"Besides, she's taken herself off," said Viollet.

If any one ever betrayed astonishment it was Plissoud when he beheld the usurer of Blangy sitting at one of the tables, and more occupied in watching him, Plissoud, than in noticing the quarrel that was going on. In spite of himself, the sheriff allowed his face to show the species of bewilderment which a man feels at an unexpected meeting with a person whom he hates and is plotting against, and he speedily withdrew into the billiard-room.

"Adieu, Père Socquard," said Rigou.

"I 'll get your carriage," said the innkeeper; "take your time."

"How shall I find out what those fellows have been saying over their pool?" Rigou was asking himself, when he happened to see the waiter's face in the mirror beside him.

The waiter was a jack at all trades; he cultivated

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Socquard's vines, swept out the café and the billiard-room, kept the garden in order, and watered the Tivoli, all for fifty francs a year. He was always without a jacket, except on grand occasions; usually his sole garments were a pair of blue linen trousers, heavy shoes, and a striped velvet waistcoat, over which he wore an apron of homespun linen when at work in the café or billiard-room. This apron, with strings, was the badge of his functions. The fellow had been hired by Socquard at the last annual fair; for in this valley, as throughout Burgundy, servants are hired in the market-place by the year, exactly as one buys horses.

"What 's your name?" said Rigou.

"Michel, at your service," replied the waiter.

"Does n't old Fourchon come here sometimes?"

"Two or three times a week, with Monsieur Vermichel, who gives me a couple of sous to warn him if his wife 's after them."

"He 's a fine old fellow, Père Fourchon; knows a great deal and is full of good sense," said Rigou, paying for his lemonade and leaving the evil-smelling place when he saw Père Socquard leading his horse round.

Just as he was about to get into the carriage, Rigou noticed the chemist crossing the square and hailed him with a "Ho, there, Monsieur Vermut!" Recognizing the rich man, Vermut hurried up. Rigou joined him, and said in a low voice: —

"Are there any drugs that can eat into the tissue of the skin so as to produce a real disease, like a whitlow on the finger, for instance?"

"If Monsieur Gourdon would help, yes," answered the little chemist.

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"Vermut, not a word of all this, or you and I will quarrel; but speak of the matter to Monsieur Gourdon, and tell him to come and see me the day after to-morrow. I may be able to procure him the delicate operation of cutting off a forefinger."

Then, leaving the little man thoroughly bewildered, Rigou got into the carriole beside Marie Tonsard.

"Well, you little viper," he said, taking her by the arm when he had fastened the reins to a hook in front of the leathern apron which closed the carriole and the horse had started on a trot, "do you think you can keep Bonnébault by giving way to such violence? If you were a wise girl you would promote his marriage with that hogshead of stupidity and take your revenge afterwards."

Marie could not help smiling as she answered: —

"Ah, how bad you are! you are the master of us all in wickedness."

"Listen to me, Marie; I like the peasants, but it won't do for any one of you to come between my teeth and a mouthful of game. Your brother Nicolas, as Aglaë said, is after La Péchina. That must not be; I protect her, that girl. She is to be my heiress for thirty thousand francs, and I intend to marry her well. I know that Nicolas, helped by your sister Catherine, came near killing the little thing this morning. You are to see your brother and sister at once, and say to them: 'If you let La Péchina alone, Père Rigou will save Nicolas from the conscription."

"You are the devil incarnate!" cried Marie. "They do say you 've signed a compact with him. Is that true?"

"Yes," replied Rigou, gravely.

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"I heard it, but I did n't believe it."

"He has guaranteed that no attacks aimed at me shall hurt me; that I shall never be robbed; that I shall live a hundred years and succeed in everything I undertake, and be as young to the day of my death as a two-year old cockerel —"

"Well, if that's so," said Marie, "it must be *devilishly* easy for you to save my brother from the conscription —"

"If he chooses, that's to say. He 'll have to lose a finger," returned Rigou. "I 'll tell him how."

"Look out, you are taking the upper road!" exclaimed Marie.

"I never go by the lower at night," said the ex-monk.

"On account of the cross?" said Marie, naïvely.

"That's it, sly-boots," replied her diabolical companion.

They had reached a spot where the high-road cuts through a slight elevation of ground, making on each side of it a rather steep slope, such as we often see on the mail-roads of France. At the end of this little gorge, which is about a hundred feet long, the roads to Ronquerolles and to Cerneux meet and form an open space, in the centre of which stands a cross. From either slope a man could aim at a victim and kill him at close quarters, with all the more ease because the little hill is covered with vines, and the evil-doer could lie in ambush among the briers and brambles that overgrow them. We can readily imagine why the usurer did not take that road after dark. The Thune flows round the little hill; and the place is called the Close of the Cross. No spot was ever more adapted for re-

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venge or murder, for the road to Ronquerolles continues to the bridge over the Avonne in front of the pavilion of the Rendezvous, while that to Cerneux leads off above the mail-road; so that between the four roads, — to Les Aigues, Ville-aux-Fayes, Ronquerolles, and Cerneux, — a murderer could choose his line of retreat and leave his pursuers in uncertainty.

"I shall drop you at the entrance of the village," said Rigou when they neared the first houses of Blangy.

"Because you are afraid of Annette, old coward!" cried Marie. "When are you going to send her away? you have had her now three years. What amuses me is that your old woman still lives; the good God knows how to revenge himself."

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## IV.

### THE TRIUMVIRATE OF VILLE-AUX-FAYES.

THE cautious usurer compelled his wife and Jean to go to bed and to rise by daylight; assuring them that the house would never be attacked if he sat up till midnight, and he never himself rose till late. Not only had he thus secured himself from interruption between seven at night and five the next morning but he had accustomed his wife and Jean to respect his morning sleep and that of Hagar, whose room was directly behind his.

So, on the following morning, about half past six, Madame Rigou, who herself took care of the poultry-yard with some assistance from Jean, knocked timidly at her husband's door.

"Monsieur Rigou," she said, "you told me to wake you."

The tones of that voice, the attitude of the woman, her frightened air as she obeyed an order the execution of which might be ill-received, showed the utter self-abnegation in which the poor creature lived, and the affection she still bore to her petty tyrant.

"Very good," replied Rigou.

"Shall I wake Annette?" she asked.

"No, let her sleep; she has been up half the night," he replied, gravely.

The man was always grave, even when he allowed himself to jest. Annette had in fact opened the door

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secretly to Sibilet, Fourchon, and Catherine Tonsard, who all came at different hours between eleven and two o'clock.

Ten minutes later Rigou, dressed with more care than usual, came downstairs and greeted his wife with a "Good-morning, my old woman," which made her happier than if counts had knelt at her feet.

"Jean," he said to the ex-lay-brother, "don't leave the house; if any one robs me it will be worse for you than for me."

By thus mingling mildness and severity, hopes and rebuffs, the clever egoist kept his three slaves faithful and close at his heels, like dogs.

Taking the upper road, so-called, to avoid the Close of the Cross, Rigou reached the square of Soulanges about eight o'clock.

Just as he was fastening his rein to the post nearest the little door with three steps, a blind opened and Soudry showed his face, pitted with the small-pox, which the expression of his small black eyes rendered crafty.

"Let's begin by taking a crust here before we start," he said; "we sha'n't get breakfast at Ville-aux-Fayes before one o'clock."

Then he softly called a servant-girl, as young and pretty as Annette, who came down noiselessly, and received his order for ham and bread; after which he went himself to the cellar and fetched some wine.

Rigou contemplated for the hundredth time the well-known dining-room, floored in oak, with stuccoed ceiling and cornice, its high wainscot and handsome cupboards finely painted, its porcelain stone and magnificent tall clock, — all the property of Mademoiselle

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Laguerre. The chair-backs were in the form of lyres, painted white and highly varnished; the seats were of green morocco with gilt nails. A massive mahogany table was covered with green oilcloth, with large squares of a deeper shade of green, and a plain border of the lighter. The floor, laid in Hungarian point, was carefully waxed by Urbain and showed the care which ex-waiting-women know how to exact out of their servants.

"Bah! it cost too much," thought Rigou for the hundredth time. "I can eat as good a dinner in my room as here, and I have the income of the money this useless splendor would have wasted. Where is Madame Soudry?" he asked, as the mayor returned armed with a venerable bottle.

"Asleep."

"And you no longer disturb her slumbers?" said Rigou.

The ex-gendarme winked with a knowing air, and pointed to the ham which Jeannette, the pretty maid, was just bringing in.

"That will pick you up, a pretty bit like that," he said. "It was cured in the house; we cut into it only yesterday."

"Where did you find her?" said the ex-Benedictine in Soudry's ear.

"She is like the ham," replied the ex-gendarme, winking again; "I have had her only a week."

Jeannette, still in her night-cap, with a short petticoat and her bare feet in slippers, had slipped on a boddice made with straps over the arms in true peasant fashion, over which she had crossed a neckerchief which did not entirely hide her fresh and youthful attractions,

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which were at least as appetizing as the ham she carried. Short and plump, with bare arms mottled red, ending in large, dimpled hands with short but well-made fingers, she was a picture of health. The face was that of a true Burgundian, — ruddy, but white about the temples, throat, and ears; the hair was chestnut; the corners of the eyes turned up towards the top of the ears; the nostrils were wide, the mouth sensual, and a little down lay along the cheeks; all this, together with a jaunty expression, tempered however by a deceitfully modest attitude, made her the model of a roguish servant-girl.

"On my honor, Jeannette is as good as the ham," said Rigou. "If I had n't an Annette I should want a Jeannette."

"One is as good as the other," said the ex-gendarme, for your Annette is gentle and fair and delicate. "How is Madame Rigou, — is she asleep?" added Soudry, roughly, to let Rigou see he understood his joke.

"She wakes with the cock, but she goes to roost with the hens," replied Rigou. "As for me, I sit up and read the 'Constitutionnel.' My wife lets me sleep at night and in the morning too; she would n't come into my room for all the world."

"It 's just the other way here," replied Jeannette. "Madame sits up with the company playing cards; sometimes there are sixteen of them in the salon; Monsieur goes to bed at eight o'clock, and we get up at daylight — "

"You think that 's different," said Rigou, "but it comes to the same thing in the end. Well, my dear, you come to me and I 'll send Annette here, and that will be the same thing and different too."

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"Old scamp, you 'll make her ashamed," said Soudry.

"Ha! gendarme; you want your field to yourself! Well, we all get our happiness where we can find it."

Jeannette, by her master's order, disappeared to lay out his clothes.

"You must have promised to marry her when your wife dies," said Rigou.

"At your age and mine," replied Soudry, "there 's no other way."

"With girls of any ambition it would be one way to become a widower," added Rigou; "especially if Madame Soudry found fault with Jeannette for her way of scrubbing the staircase."

The remark made the two husbands pensive. When Jeannette returned and announced that all was ready, Soudry said to her, "Come and help me!"—a precaution which made the ex-monk smile.

"There 's a difference, indeed!" said he. "As for me, I 'd leave you alone with Annette, my good friend."

A quarter of an hour later Soudry, in his best clothes, got into the wicker carriage, and the two friends drove round the lake of Soulanges to Ville-aux-Fayes.

"Look at it!" said Rigou, as they reached an eminence from which the château of Soulanges could be seen in profile.

The old revolutionary put into the tone of his words all the hatred which the rural middle classes feel to the great châteaus and the great estates.

"Yes, but I hope it will never be destroyed as long as I live," said Soudry. "The Comte de Soulanges was my general; he did me kindness; he got my pen-

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sion, and he allows Lupin to manage the estate. After Lupin some of us will have it, and as long as the Soulanges family exists they and their property will be respected. Such folks are large-minded; they let every one make his profit, and they find it pays."

"Yes, but the Comte de Soulanges has three children, who, at his death, may not agree," replied Rigou. "The husband of his daughter and his sons may go to law, and end by selling the lead and iron mines to manufacturers, from whom we shall manage to get them back."

The château just then showed up in profile, as if to defy the ex-monk.

"Ah! look at it; in those days they built well," cried Soudry. "But just now Monsieur le Comte is economizing, so as to make Soulanges the entailed estate of his peerage."

"My dear friend," said Rigou, "entailed estates won't exist much longer."

When the topic of public matters was exhausted, the worthy pair began to discuss the merits of their pretty maids in terms too Burgundian to be printed here. That inexhaustible subject carried them so far that before they knew it they saw the capital of the arrondissement over which Gaubertin reigned, and which we hope excites enough curiosity in the reader's mind to justify a short digression.

The name of Ville-aux-Fayes, singular as it is, is explained as the corruption of the words (in low Latin) *Villa in Fago*, — the manor of the woods. This name indicates that a forest once covered the delta formed by the Avonne before it joins its confluent the Yonne. Some Frank doubtless built a



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fortress on the hill which slopes gently to the long plain. The savage conqueror separated his vantage-ground from the delta by a wide and deep moat and made the position a formidable one, essentially seignorial, convenient for enforcing tolls across the bridges and for protecting his rights of profit on all grains ground in the mills.

That is the history of the beginning of Ville-aux-Fayes. Wherever feudal or ecclesiastical dominion established itself there we find gathered together interests, inhabitants, and, later, towns when the localities were in a position to maintain them and to found and develop great industries. The method of floating timber discovered by Jean Rouvet in 1549, which required certain convenient stations to intercept it, was the making of Ville-aux-Fayes, which, up to that time, had been, compared to Soulanges, a mere village. Ville-aux-Fayes became a storage place for timber, which covered the shores of the two rivers for a distance of over thirty miles. The work of taking out of the water, computing the lost logs, and making the rafts which the Yonne carried down to the Seine, brought together a large concourse of workmen. Such a population increased consumption and encouraged trade. Thus Ville-aux-Fayes, which had but six hundred inhabitants at the end of the seventeenth century, had two thousand in 1790, and Gaubertin had now raised the number to four thousand, by the following means.

When the legislative assembly decreed the new laying out of territory, Ville-aux-Fayes, which was situated where, geographically, a sub-prefecture was needed, was chosen instead of Soulanges as chief town or capital of the arrondissement. The increased population

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of Paris, by increasing the demand for and the value of wood as fuel, necessarily increased the commerce of Ville-aux-Fayes. Gaubertin had founded his fortune, after losing his stewardship, on this growing business, estimating the effect of peace on the population of Paris, which did actually increase by over one-third between 1815 and 1825.

The shape of Ville-aux-Fayes followed the conformation of the ground. Each side of the promontory was lined with wharves. The dam to stop the timber from floating further down was just below a hill covered by the forest of Soulanges. Between the dam and the town lay a suburb. The lower town, covering the greater part of the delta, came down to the shores of the lake of the Avonne.

Above the lower town some five hundred houses with gardens, standing on the heights, were grouped round three sides of the promontory, and enjoyed the varied scene of the diamond waters of the lake, the rafts in construction along its edge, and the piles of wood upon the shores. The waters, laden with timber from the river and the rapids which fed the mill-races and the sluices of a few manufactories, presented an animated scene, all the more charming because inclosed in the greenery of forests, while the long valley of Les Aigues offered a glorious contrast to the dark foil of the heights above the town itself.

Gaubertin had built himself a house on the level of the delta, intending to make a place which should improve the locality and render the lower town as desirable as the upper. It was a modern house built of stone, with a balcony of iron railings, outside blinds, painted windows, and no ornament but a line of fret-

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work under the eaves, a slate roof, one story in height with a garret, a fine courtyard, and behind it an English garden bathed by the waters of the Avonne. The elegance of the place compelled the department to build a fine edifice nearly opposite to it for the sub-prefecture, provisionally lodged in a mere kennel. The town itself also built a town-hall. The law-courts had lately been installed in a new edifice; so that Ville-aux-Fayes owed to the active influence of its present mayor a number of really imposing public buildings. The gendarmerie had also built barracks which completed the square formed by the market-place.

These changes, on which the inhabitants prided themselves, were due to the impetus given by Gaubertin, who within a day or two had received the cross of the Legion of honor, in anticipation of the coming birthday of the king. In a town so situated and so modern there was of course, neither aristocracy nor nobility. Consequently, the rich merchants of Ville-aux-Fayes, proud of their own independence, willingly espoused the cause of the peasantry against a count of the Empire who had taken sides with the Restoration. To them the oppressors were the oppressed. The spirit of this commercial town was so well known to the government that they sent there as sub-prefect a man with a conciliatory temper, a pupil of his uncle, the well-known des Lupeaulx, one of those men, accustomed to compromise, who are familiar with the difficulties and necessities of all administrations, but whom puritan politicians, doing infinitely worse things, call corrupt.

The interior of Gaubertin's house was decorated with the unmeaning commonplaces of modern luxury. Rich papers with gold borders, bronze chandeliers, mahog-

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any furniture of a new pattern, astral lamps, round tables with marble tops, white china with gilt lines for dessert, red morocco chairs and mezzo-tint engravings in the dining-room, and blue cashmere furniture in the salon, — all details of a chilling and perfectly unmeaning character, but which to the eyes of Ville-aux-Fayes seemed the last efforts of Sardanapalian luxury. Madame Gaubertin played the rôle of elegance with great effect; she assumed little airs and was lackadaisical at forty-five years of age, as though certain of the homage of her court.

We ask those who really know France, if these houses — those of Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin — are not a perfect presentation of the village, the little town, and the seat of a sub-prefecture?

Without being a man of mind, or a man of talent, Gaubertin had the appearance of being both. He owed the accuracy of his perception and his consummate art to an extreme keenness after gain. He desired wealth, not for his wife, not for his children, not for himself, not for his family, not for the reputation that money gives; after the gratification of his revenge (the hope of which kept him alive) he loved the touch of money, like Nucingen, who, it was said, kept fingering the gold in his pockets. The rush of business was Gaubertin's wine; and though he had his belly full of it, he had all the eagerness of one who was empty. As with valets of the drama, intrigues, tricks to play, mischief to organize, deceptions, commercial over-reachings, accounts to render and receive, disputes, and quarrels of self-interest, exhilarated him, kept his blood in circulation, and his bile flowing. He went and came on foot, on horseback, in a carriage, by water; he was at all auc-

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tions and timber sales in Paris, thinking of everything, keeping hundreds of wires in his hands and never getting them tangled.

Quick, decided in his movements as in his ideas, short and squat in figure, with a thin nose, a fiery eye, an ear on the *qui vive,* there was something of the hunting-dog about him. His brown face, very round and sunburned, from which the tanned ears stood out prominently, — for he always wore a cap, — was in keeping with that character. His nose turned up; his tightly-closed lips could never have opened to say a kindly thing. His bushy whiskers formed a pair of black and shiny tufts beneath the highly-colored cheek-bones, and were lost in his cravat. Hair that was pepper-and-salt in color and frizzled naturally in stages like those of a judge's wig, seeming scorched by the fury of the fire which heated his brown skull and gleamed in his gray eyes surrounded by circular wrinkles (no doubt from a habit of always blinking when he looked across the country in full sunlight), completed the characteristics of his physiognomy. His lean and vigorous hands were hairy, knobbed, and claw-like, like those of men who do their share of labor. His personality was agreeable to those with whom he had to do, for he wrapped it in a misleading gayety; he knew how to talk a great deal without saying a word of what he meant to keep unsaid. He wrote little, so as to deny anything that escaped him which might prove unfavorable in its after effects upon his interests. His books and papers were kept by a cashier, — an honest man, whom men of Gaubertin's stamp always seek to get hold of, and whom they make, in their own selfish interests, their first dupe.

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When Rigou's little green chaise appeared, towards twelve o'clock, in the broad avenue which skirts the river, Gaubertin, in cap, boots, and jacket, was returning from the wharves. He hastened his steps, — feeling very sure that Rigou's object in coming over could only be "the great affair."

"Good morning, gendarme; good morning, paunch of gall and wisdom," he said, giving a little slap to the stomachs of his two visitors. "We have business to talk over, and, faith! we'll do it glass in hand; that's the true way to take things."

"If you do your business that way, you ought to be fatter than you are," said Rigou.

"I work too hard; I'm not like you two, confined to the house and bewitched there, like old dotards. Well, well, after all that's the best way; you can do your business comfortably in an arm-chair, with your back to the fire and your belly at table; custom goes to you, I have to go after it. But now, come in, come in! the house is yours for the time you stay."

A servant, in blue livery edged with scarlet, took the horse by the bridle and led him into the courtyard, where were the offices and the stable.

Gaubertin left his guests to walk about the garden for a moment, while he went to give his orders and arrange about the breakfast.

"Well, my wolves," he said, as he returned, rubbing his hands, "the gendarmerie of Soulanges were seen this morning at daybreak, marching towards Conches; no doubt they mean to arrest the peasants for depredations; ha, ha! things are getting warm, warm! By this time," he added, looking at his watch, "those fellows may have been arrested."

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"Probably," said Rigou.

"Well, what do you all say over there? Has anything been decided?"

"What is there to decide?" asked Rigou. "We have no part in it," he added, looking at Soudry.

"How do you mean nothing to decide? If Les Aigues is sold as the result of our coalition, who is to gain five or six hundred thousand francs out of it? Do you expect me to, all alone? No, my inside is not strong enough to spit up two millions, with three children to establish, and a wife who has n't the first idea of the value of money; no, I must have associates. Here 's the gendarme, he has plenty of funds all ready. I know he does n't hold a single mortgage that is n't ready to mature; he only lends now on notes at sight which I endorse. I 'll go into this thing to the amount of eight hundred thousand francs; my son, the judge, two hundred thousand; and I count on the gendarme for two hundred thousand more; now, how much will you put in, skull-cap?"

"All the rest," replied Rigou, stiffly.

"The devil! well, I wish I had my hand where your heart is!" exclaimed Gaubertin. "Now what are you going to do?"

"Whatever you do; tell your plan."

"My plan," said Gaubertin, "is to take double, and sell half to the Conches, and Cerneux, and Blangy folks who want to buy. Soudry has his clients, and you yours, and I, mine. That 's not the difficulty. The thing is, how are we going to arrange among ourselves? How shall we divide up the great lots?"

"Nothing easier," said Rigou. "We 'll each take what we like best. I, for one, shall stand in nobody's

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way; I'll take the woods in common with Soudry and my son-in-law; the timber has been so injured that you won't care for it now, and you may have all the rest. Faith, it is worth the money you 'll put into it!"

"Will you sign that agreement?" said Soudry.

"A written agreement is worth nothing," replied Gaubertin. "Besides, you know I am playing above board; I have perfect confidence in Rigou, and he shall be the purchaser."

"That will satisfy me," said Rigou.

"I will make only one condition," added Gaubertin. "I must have the pavilion of the Rendezvous, with all its appurtenances, and fifty acres of the surrounding land. I shall make it my country-house, and it will be near my woods. Madame Gaubertin — Madame Isaure, for that 's what she wants people to call her — says she shall make it her villa."

"I 'm willing," said Rigou.

"Well, now, between ourselves," continued Gaubertin, after looking about him on all sides and making sure that no one could overhear him, "do you think they are capable of striking a blow?"

"Such as?" asked Rigou, who never allowed himself to understand a hint.

"Well, if the worst of the band, the best shot, sent a ball whistling round the ears of the count — just to frighten him?"

"He 's a man to rush at an assailant and collar him."

"Michaud, then."

"Michaud would do nothing at the moment, but he 'd watch and spy till he found out the man and those who instigated him."

"You are right," said Gaubertin; "those peasants

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must make a riot and a few must be sent to the galleys. Well, so much the better for us; the authorities will catch the worst, whom we shall want to get rid of after they 've done the work. There are those blackguards, the Tonsards and Bonnébault — "

"Tonsard is ready for mischief," said Soudry, "I know that; and we 'll work him up by Vaudoyer and Courtecuisse."

"I 'll answer for Courtecuisse," said Rigou.

"And I hold Vaudoyer in the hollow of my hand."

"Be cautious!" said Rigou; "before everything else be cautious."

"Now, papa skull-cap, do you mean to tell me that there 's any harm in speaking of things as they are? Is it we who are indicting and arresting, or gleaning or depredating? If Monsieur le comte knows what he 's about and leases the woods to the receiver-general it is all up with our schemes, — 'Farewell baskets, the vintage is o'er;' in that case you will lose more than I. What we say here is between ourselves and for ourselves; for I certainly would n't say a word to Vaudoyer that I could n't repeat to God and man. But it is not forbidden, I suppose, to profit by any events that may take place. The peasantry of this canton are hot-headed; the general's exactions, his severity, Michaud's persecutions, and those of his keepers have exasperated them; to-day things have come to a crisis and I 'll bet there 's a rumpus going on now with the gendarmerie. And so, let 's go and breakfast."

Madame Gaubertin came into the garden just then. She was a rather fair woman with long curls, called English, hanging down her cheeks, who played the style of sentimental virtue, pretended never to have known

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love, talked platonics to all the men about her, and kept the prosecuting-attorney at her beck and call. She was given to caps with large bows, but preferred to wear only her own hair. She danced, and at forty-five years of age had the mincing manners of a girl; her feet, however, were large and her hands frightful. She wished to be called Isaure, because among her other oddities and absurdities she had the taste to repudiate the name of Gaubertin as vulgar. Her eyes were light and her hair of an undecided color, something like dirty nankeen. Such as she was, she was taken as a model by a number of young ladies, who stabbed the skies with their glances, and posed as angels.

"Well, gentlemen," she said, bowing, "I have some strange news for you. The gendarmerie have returned."

"Did they make any prisoners?"

"None; the general, it seems, had previously obtained the pardon of the depredators. It was given in honor of this happy anniversary of the king's restoration to France."

The three associates looked at each other.

"He is cleverer than I thought for, that big cuirassier!" said Gaubertin. "Well, come to breakfast. After all, the game is not lost, only postponed; it is your affair now, Rigou."

Soudry and Rigou drove back disappointed, not being able as yet to plan any other catastrophe to serve their ends and relying, as Gaubertin advised, on what might turn up. Like certain Jacobins at the outset of the Revolution who were furious with Louis XVI.'s conciliations, and who provoked severe measures at court in the hope of producing anarchy, which to them meant

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fortune and power, the formidable enemies of General Montcornet staked their present hopes on the severity which Michaud and his keepers were likely to employ against future depredators. Gaubertin promised them his assistance, without explaining who were his co-operators, for he did not wish them to know about his relations with Sibilet. Nothing can equal the prudence of a man of Gaubertin's stamp, unless it be that of an ex-gendarme or an unfrocked priest. This plot could not have been brought to a successful issue, — a successfully evil issue, — unless by three such men as these, steeped in hatred and self-interest.

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## V.

### VICTORY WITHOUT A FIGHT.

MADAME MICHAUD'S fears were the effect of that second sight which comes of true passion. Exclusively absorbed by one only being, the soul finally grasps the whole moral world which surrounds that being; it sees clearly. A woman when she loves feels the same presentiments which disquiet her later when a mother.

While the poor young woman listened to the confused voices coming from afar across an unknown space, a scene was really happening in the tavern of the Grand-I-Vert which threatened her husband's life.

About five o'clock that morning early risers had seen the gendarmerie of Soulanges on its way to Conches. The news circulated rapidly; and those whom it chiefly interested were much surprised to learn from others, who lived on high ground, that a detachment commanded by the lieutenant of Ville-aux-Fayes had marched through the forest of Les Aigues. As it was a Monday, there were already good reasons why the peasants should be at the tavern; but it was also the eve of the anniversary of the restoration of the Bourbons, and though the frequenters of Tonsard's den had no need of that "august cause" (as they said in those days) to explain their presence at the Grand-I-Vert, they did not fail to make the most of it if the mere shadow of an official functionary appeared.

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Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard and his family, Godain, and an old vine-dresser named Laroche, were there early in the morning. The latter was a man who scratched a living from day to day; he was one of the delinquents collected in Blangy under the sort of conscription invented by Sibilet and Courtecuisse to disgust the general by the results of his indictments. Blangy had supplied three men, twelve women, also eight girls and five boys for whom parents were answerable, all of whom were in a condition of pauperism; but they were the only ones who could be found that were so. The year 1823 had been a very profitable one to the peasantry, and 1826 was likely, through the enormous quantity of wine yielded, to bring them in a good deal of money; add to this the works at Les Aigues, undertaken by the general, which had put a great deal more in circulation throughout the three districts which bordered on the estate. It had therefore been quite difficult to find in Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux, one hundred and twenty indigent persons against whom to bring the suits; and in order to do so, they had taken old women, mothers, and grandmothers of those who owned property but who possessed nothing of their own, like Tonsard's mother. Laroche, an old laborer, possessed absolutely nothing; he was not, like Tonsard, hot-blooded and vicious, — his motive-power was a cold, dull hatred; he toiled in silence with a sullen face; work was intolerable to him, but he had to work to live; his features were hard and their expression repulsive. Though sixty years old, he was still strong, except that his back was bent; he saw no future before him, no spot that he could call his own, and he envied those who possessed the land; for this reason he had

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no pity on the forests of Les Aigues, and took pleasure in despoiling them uselessly.

"Will they be allowed to put us in prison?" he was saying. "After Conches they'll come to Blangy. I'm an old offender, and I shall get three months."

"What can we do against the gendarmerie, old drunkard?" said Vaudoyer.

"Why! cut the legs of their horses with our scythes. That'll bring them down; their muskets are not loaded, and when they find us ten to one against them they'll decamp. If the three villages all rose and killed two or three gendarmes, they could n't guillotine the whole of us. They'd have to give way, as they did on the other side of Burgundy, where they sent a regiment. Bah! that regiment came back again, and the peasants cut the woods just as much as they ever did."

"If we kill," said Vaudoyer; "it is better to kill one man; the question is, how to do it without danger and frighten those Arminacs so that they'll be driven out of the place."

"Which one shall we kill?" asked Laroche.

"Michaud," said Courtecuisse. "Vaudoyer is right, he's perfectly right. You'll see that when a keeper is sent to the shades there won't be one of them willing to stay even in broad daylight to watch us. Now they're there night and day, — demons!"

"Wherever one goes," said old Mother Tonsard, — who was seventy-eight years old, and presented a parchment face honey-combed with the small-pox, lighted by a pair of green eyes, and framed with dirty-white hair, which escaped in strands from a red handkerchief, — "wherever one goes, there they are! they stop us, they open our bundles, and if there's a

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single branch, a single twig of a miserable hazel, they seize the whole bundle, and they say they'll arrest us. Ha, the villains! there's no deceiving them; if they suspect you, you've got to undo the bundle. Dogs! all three are not worth a farthing! Yes, kill 'em, and it won't ruin France, I tell you!"

"Little Vatel is not so bad," said Madame Tonsard.

"He!" said Laroche, "he does his business, like the others; when there's a joke going he'll joke with you, but you are none the better with him for that. He's worse than the rest, — heartless to poor folks, like Michaud himself."

"Michaud has got a pretty wife, though," said Nicolas Tonsard.

"She's with young," said the old woman; "and if this thing goes on there'll be a queer kind of baptism for the little one when she calves."

"Oh! those Arminacs!" cried Marie Tonsard; "there's no laughing with them; and if you did, they'd threaten to arrest you."

"You've tried your hand at cajoling them, have you?" said Courtecuisse.

"You may bet on that."

"Well," said Tonsard, with a determined air, "they are men like other men, and they can be got rid of."

"But I tell you," said Marie, continuing her topic, "they won't be cajoled; I don't know what's the matter with them; that bully at the pavilion, he's married, but Vatel, Gaillard, and Steingel are not; they've not a woman belonging to them; indeed, there's not a woman in the place who would marry them."

"Well, we shall see how things go at the harvest and the vintage," said Tonsard.

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"They can't stop the gleaning," said the old woman.

"I don't know that," remarked Madame Tonsard. "Groison said that the mayor was going to publish a notice that no one should glean without a certificate of pauperism; and who's to give that certificate? Himself, of course. He won't give many, I tell you! And they say he is going to issue an order that no one shall enter the fields till the carts are all loaded."

"Why, the fellow's a pestilence!" cried Tonsard, beside himself with rage.

"I heard that only yesterday," said Madame Tonsard. "I offered Groison a glass of brandy to get something out of him."

"Groison! there's another lucky fellow!" said Vaudoyer, "they've built him a house and given him a good wife, and he's got an income and clothes fit for a king. There was I, field-keeper for twenty years, and all I got was the rheumatism."

"Yes, he's very lucky," said Godain, "he owns property —"

"And we go without, like the fools that we are," said Vaudoyer. "Come, let's be off and find out what's going on at Conches; they are not so patient over there as we are."

"Come on," said Laroche, who was none too steady on his legs. "If I don't exterminate one or two of those fellows may I lose my name."

"You!" said Tonsard, "you'd let them put the whole district in prison; but I — if they dare to touch my old mother, there's my gun and it never misses."

"Well," said Laroche to Vaudoyer, "I tell you that if they make a single prisoner at Conches one gendarme shall fall."



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"He has said it, old Laroche!" cried Courtecuisse.

"He has said it," remarked Vaudoyer, "but he has n't done it and he won't do it. What good would it do to get yourself guillotined for some gendarme or other? No, if you kill, I say, kill Michaud."

During this scene Catherine Tonsard stood sentinel at the door to warn the drinkers to keep silent if any one passed. In spite of their half-drunken legs they sprang rather than walked out of the tavern, and their bellicose temper started them at a good pace on the road to Conches, which led for over a mile along the park wall of Les Aigues.

Conches was a true Burgundian village, with one street, which was crossed by the main road. The houses were built either of brick or of cobblestones, and were squalid in aspect. Following the mail-road from Ville-aux-Fayes, the village was seen from the rear and there it presented rather a picturesque effect. Between the road and the Ronquerolles woods, which continued those of Les Aigues and crowned the heights, flowed a little river, and several houses, rather prettily grouped, enlivened the scene. The church and the parsonage stood alone and were seen from the park of Les Aigues, which came nearly up to them. In front of the church was a square bordered by trees, where the conspirators of the Grand-I-Vert saw the gendarmerie and immediately hastened their already hasty steps. Just then three men on horseback rode rapidly out of the park of Les Aigues and the peasants at once recognized the general, his groom, and Michaud the bailiff, who came at a gallop into the square. Tonsard and his party arrived a minute or two after them. The delinquents, men and women, had made no resistance, and were

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standing between five of the Soulanges gendarmes and fifteen of those from Ville-aux-Fayes. The whole village had assembled. The fathers, mothers, and children of the prisoners were going and coming and bringing them what they might want in prison. It was a curious scene, that of a population one and all exasperated, but nearly all silent, as though they had made up their minds to a course of action. The old women and the young ones alone spoke. The children, boys and girls, were perched on piles of wood and heaps of stones to get a better sight of what was happening.

"They have chosen their time, those hussars of the guillotine," said one old woman; "they are making a fête of it."

"Are you going to let 'em carry off your man like that? How shall you manage to live for three months? — the best of the year, too, when he could earn so much."

"It's they who rob us," replied the woman, looking at the gendarmes with a threatening air.

"What do you mean by that, old woman?" said the sergeant. "If you insult us it won't take long to settle you."

"I meant nothing," said the old woman, in a humble and piteous tone.

"I heard you say something just now you may have cause to repent of."

"Come, come, be calm, all of you," said the mayor of Conches, who was also the postmaster. "What the devil is the use of talking? These men, as you know very well, are under orders and must obey."

"That's true; it's the owner of Les Aigues who persecutes us — But patience!"

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Just then the general rode into the square and his arrival caused a few groans which did not trouble him in the least. He rode straight up to the lieutenant in command, and after saying a few words gave him a paper; the officer then turned to his men and said: "Release your prisoners; the general has obtained their pardon."

General Montcornet was then speaking to the mayor; after a few moments' conversation in a low tone, the latter, addressing the delinquents, who expected to sleep in prison and were a good deal surprised to find themselves free, said to them: —

"My friends, thank Monsieur le comte. You owe your release to him. He went to Paris and obtained your pardon in honor of the anniversary of the king's restoration. I hope that in future you will conduct yourself properly to a man who has behaved so well to you, and that you will in future respect his property. Long live the King!"

The peasants shouted "Long live the King!" with enthusiasm, to avoid shouting, "Hurrah for the Comte de Montcornet!"

The scene was a bit of policy arranged between the general, the prefect, and the attorney-general; for they were all anxious, while showing enough firmness to keep the local authorities up to their duty and awe the country-people, to be as gentle as possible, fully realizing as they did the difficulties of the question. In fact, if resistance had occurred, the government would have been in a tight place. As Laroche truly said, they could not guillotine or even convict a whole community.

The general invited the mayor of Conches, the lieutenant, and the sergeant to breakfast. The conspirators

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of the Grand-I-Vert adjourned to the tavern of Conches, where the delinquents spent in drink the money their relations had given them to take to prison, sharing it with the Blangy people, who were naturally part of the wedding, — the word "wedding" being applied indiscriminately in Burgundy to all such rejoicings. To drink, quarrel, fight, eat, and go home drunk and sick, — that is a wedding to these peasants.

The general, who had come by the park, took his guests back through the forest that they might see for themselves the injury done to the timber, and so judge of the importance of the question.

Just as Rigou and Soudry were on their way back to Blangy, the count and countess, Émile Blondet, the lieutenant of gendarmerie, the sergeant, and the mayor of Conches were finishing their breakfast in the splendid dining-room where Bouret's luxury had left the delightful traces already described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan.

"It would be a terrible pity to abandon this beautiful home," said the lieutenant, who had never before been at Les Aigues, and who was glancing over a glass of champagne at the circling nymphs that supported the ceiling.

"We intend to defend it to the death," said Blondet.

"If I say that," continued the lieutenant, looking at his sergeant as if to enjoin silence, "it is because the general's enemies are not only among the peasantry —"

The worthy man was quite moved by the excellence of the breakfast, the magnificence of the silver service, the imperial luxury that surrounded him, and Blondet's clever talk excited him as much as the champagne he had imbibed.

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"Enemies! have I enemies?" said the general, surprised.

"He, so kind!" added the countess.

"But you are on bad terms with our mayor, Monsieur Gaubertin," said the lieutenant. "It would be wise, for the sake of the future, to be reconciled with him."

"With him!" cried the count. "Then you don't know that he was my former steward, and a swindler!"

"A swindler no longer," said the lieutenant, "for he is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Blondet, "the lieutenant's wit is keen; evidently a mayor is essentially an honest man."

The lieutenant, convinced by the count's words that it was useless to attempt to enlighten him, said no more on that subject, and the conversation changed.

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## VI.

### THE FOREST AND THE HARVEST.

THE scene at Conches had, apparently, a good effect on the peasantry; on the other hand, the count's faithful keepers were more than ever watchful that only dead wood should be gathered in the forest of Les Aigues. But for the last twenty years the woods had been so thoroughly cleared out that very little else than live wood was now there; and this the peasantry set about killing, in preparation for winter, by a simple process, the results of which could only be discovered in the course of time. Tonsard's mother went daily into the forest; the keepers saw her enter; knew where she would come out; watched for her and made her open her bundle, where, to be sure, were only fallen branches, dried chips, and broken and withered twigs. The old woman would whine and complain at the distance she had to go at her age to gather such a miserable bundle of fagots. But she did not tell that she had been in the thickest part of the wood and had removed the earth at the base of certain young trees, round which she had then cut off a ring of bark, replacing the earth, moss, and dead leaves just as they were before she touched them. It was impossible that any one could discover this annular incision, made, not like a cut, but more like the ripping or gnawing of animals or those destructive insects called in different regions borers, or turks, or white worms, which are the first stage of cockchafers.

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These destructive pests are fond of the bark of trees; they get between the bark and the sap-wood and eat their way round. If the tree is large enough for the insect to pass into its second state (of larvæ, in which it remains dormant till its second metamorphose) before it has gone round the trunk, the tree lives, because so long as even a small bit of the sap-wood remains covered by the bark, the tree will still grow and recover itself. To realize to what a degree entomology affects agriculture, horticulture, and all earth products, we must know that naturalists like Latreille, the Comte Dejean, Klugg of Berlin, Gené of Turin, etc., find that the vast majority of all known insects live at the sacrifice of vegetation; that the coleoptera (a catalogue of which has lately been published by Monsieur Dejean) have twenty-seven thousand species, and that, in spite of the most earnest research on the part of entomologists of all countries, there is an enormous number of species of whom they cannot trace the triple transformations which belong to all insects; that there is, in short, not only a special insect to every plant, but that all terrestrial products, however much they may be manipulated by human industry, have their particular parasite. Thus flax, after covering the human body and hanging the human being, after roaming the world on the back of an army, becomes writing-paper; and those who write or who read are familiar with the habits and morals of an insect called the "paper-louse," an insect of really marvellous celerity and behavior; it undergoes its mysterious transformations in a ream of white paper which you have carefully put away; you see it gliding and frisking along in its shining robe, that looks like isinglass or mica, — truly a little fish of another element.

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The borer is the despair of the land-owner; he works underground; no Sicilian vespers for him until he becomes a cockchafer! If the populations only realized with what untold disasters they are threatened in case they let the cockchafers and the caterpillars get the upper hand, they would pay more attention than they do to municipal regulations.

Holland came near perishing; its dikes were undermined by the teredo, and science is unable to discover the insect from which that mollusk derives, just as science still remains ignorant of the metamorphoses of the cochineal. The ergot, or spur, of rye is apparently a population of insects where the genius of science has been able, so far, to discover only one slight movement. Thus, while awaiting the harvest and the gleaning, fifty old women imitated the borer at the feet of five or six hundred trees which were fated to become skeletons and to put forth no more leaves in the spring. They were carefully chosen in the least accessible places, so that the surrounding branches concealed them.

Who conveyed the secret information by which this was done? No one. Courtecuisse happened to complain in Tonsard's tavern of having found a tree wilting in his garden; it seemed he said, to have a disease, and he suspected a borer; for he, Courtecuisse, knew what borers were, and if they once circled a tree just below the ground, the tree died. Thereupon he explained the process. The old women at once set to work at the same destruction, with the mystery and cleverness of gnomes; and their efforts were doubled by the rules now enforced by the mayor of Blangy and necessarily followed by the mayors of the adjoining districts.

The great land-owners of the department applauded

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General de Montcornet's course; and the prefect in his private drawing-room declared that if, instead of living in Paris, other land-owners would come and live on their estates and follow such a course together, a solution of the difficulty could be obtained; for certain measures, added the prefect, ought to be taken, and taken in concert, modified by benefactions and by an enlightened philanthropy, such as every one could see actuated General Montcornet.

The general and his wife, assisted by the abbé, tried the effects of such benevolence. They studied the subject, and endeavored to show by incontestable results to those who pillaged them that more money could be made by legitimate toil. They supplied flax and paid for the spinning; the countess had the thread woven into linen suitable for towels, aprons, and coarse napkins for kitchen use, and for underclothing for the very poor. The general began improvements which needed many laborers, and he employed none but those in the adjoining districts. Sibilet was in charge of the works and the Abbé Brossette gave the countess lists of the most needy, and often brought them to her himself. Madame de Montcornet attended to these matters personally in the great antechamber which opened upon the portico. It was a beautiful waiting-room, floored with squares of white and red marble, warmed by a porcelain stove, and furnished with benches covered with red plush.

It was there that one morning, just before harvest, old Mother Tonsard brought her granddaughter Catherine, who had to make, she said, a dreadful confession, — dreadful for the honor of a poor but honest family. While the old woman addressed the countess

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Catherine stood in an attitude of conscious guilt. Then she related on her own account the unfortunate "situation" in which she was placed, which she had confided to none but her grandmother; for her mother, she knew, would turn her out, and her father, an honorable man, might kill her. If she only had a thousand francs she could be married to a poor laborer named Godain, who *knew all*, and who loved her like a brother; he could buy a poor bit of ground and build a cottage if she had that sum. It was very touching. The countess promised the money; resolving to devote the price of some fancy to this marriage. The happy marriages of Michaud and Groison encouraged her. Besides, such a wedding would be a good example to the people of the neighborhood and stimulate to virtuous conduct. The marriage of Catherine Tonsard and Godain was accordingly arranged by means of the countess's thousand francs.

Another time a horrible old woman, Mother Bonnébault, who lived in a hut between the gate of Conches and the village, brought back a great bundle of skeins of linen thread.

"Madame la comtesse has done wonders," said the abbé, full of hope as to the moral progress of his savages. "That old woman did immense damage to your woods, but now she has no time for it; she stays at home and spins from morning till night; her time is all taken up and well paid for."

Peace reigned everywhere. Groison made very satisfactory reports; depredations seemed to have ceased, and it is even possible that the state of the neighborhood and the feeling of the inhabitants might really have changed if it had not been for the revenge

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ful eagerness of Gaubertin, the cabals of the leading society of Soulanges, and the intrigues of Rigou, who one and all, with "the affair" in view, blew the embers of hatred and crime in the hearts of the peasantry of the valley des Aigues.

The keepers still complained of finding a great many branches cut with shears in the deeper parts of the wood and left to dry, evidently as a provision for winter. They watched for the delinquents without ever being able to catch them. The count, assisted by Groison, had given certificates of pauperism to only thirty or forty of the real poor of the district; but the other two mayors had been less strict. The more clement the count showed himself in the affair at Conches the more determined he was to enforce the laws about gleaning, which had now degenerated into theft. He did not interfere with the management of three of his farms which were leased to tenants, nor with those whose tenants worked for his profit, of which he had a number; but he managed six farms himself, each of about two hundred acres, and he now published a notice that it was forbidden, under pain of being arrested and made to pay the fine imposed by the courts, to enter those fields before the crop was carried away. The order concerned only his own immediate property. Rigou, who knew the country well, had let his farmlands in portions and on short leases to men who knew how to get in their own crops, and who paid him in grain; therefore gleaning did not affect him. The other proprietors were peasants, and no nefarious gleaning was attempted on their land.

When the harvest began the count went himself with Michaud to see how things were going on. Groison,

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who advised him to do this, was to be present himself at the gleaning of each particular field. The inhabitants of cities can have no idea what gleaning is to the inhabitants of the country; the passion of these sons of the soil for it seems inexplicable; there are women who will give up well-paid employments to glean. The wheat they pick up seems to them sweeter than any other; and the provision they thus make for their chief and most substantial food has to them an extraordinary attraction. Mothers take their babes and their little girls and boys; the feeblest old men drag themselves into the wheat-fields; and even those who own property are paupers for the nonce. All gleaners appear in rags.

The count and Michaud were present on horseback when the first tattered batch entered the first fields from which the wheat had been carried. It was ten o'clock in the morning. August had been a hot month, the sky was cloudless, blue as a periwinkle; the earth was baked, the wheat flamed, the harvestmen worked with their faces scorched by the reflection of the sun-rays on the hard and arid earth. All were silent, their shirts wet with perspiration; while from time to time, they slaked their thirst with water from round, earthenware jugs, furnished with two handles and a mouth-piece stoppered with a willow stick.

At the farther end of the stubble-field stood the carts which contained the sheaves, and near them a group of at least a hundred beings who far exceeded the hideous conceptions of Murillo and Teniers, the boldest painters of such scenes, or of Callot, that poet of the fantastic in poverty. The pictured bronze legs, the bare heads, the ragged garments so curiously

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faded, so damp with grease, so darned and spotted and discolored, in short, the painters' ideal of the material of abject poverty was far surpassed by this scene; while the expression on those faces, greedy, anxious, doltish, idiotic, savage, showed the everlasting advantage which nature possesses over art by its comparison with the immortal compositions of those princes of color. There were old women with necks like turkeys, and hairless, scarlet eyelids, who stretched their heads forward like setters before a partridge; there were children, silent as soldiers under arms, little girls who stamped like animals waiting for their food; the natures of childhood and old age were crushed beneath the fierceness of a savage greed, — greed for the property of others now their own by long abuse. All eyes were savage, all gestures menacing; but every one kept silence in presence of the count, the field-keeper, and the bailiff. At this moment all classes were represented, — the great land-owners, the farmers, the working men, the paupers; the social question was defined to the eye; hunger had convoked the actors in the scene. The sun threw into relief the hard and hollow features of those faces; it burned the bare feet dusty with the soil; children were present with no clothing but a torn blouse, their blond hair tangled with straw and chips; some women brought their babes just able to walk, and left them rolling in the furrows.

The gloomy scene was harrowing to the old soldier, whose heart was kind, and he said to Michaud: "It pains me to see it. One must know the importance of these measures to be able to insist upon them."

"If every land-owner followed your example, lived on his property, and did the good that you and yours

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are doing, general, there would be, I won't say no poor, for they are always with us, but no poor man who could not live by his labor."

"The mayors of Conches, Cerneux, and Soulanges have sent us all their paupers," said Groison, who had now looked at the certificates; "they had no right to do so."

"No, but our people will go to their districts," said the general. "For the time being we have done enough by preventing the gleaning before the sheaves were taken away; we had better go step by step," he added, turning to leave the field.

"Did you hear him?" said Mother Tonsard to the old Bonnébault woman, for the general's last words were said in a rather louder tone than the rest, and reached the ears of the two old women who were posted in the road which led beside the field.

"Yes, yes! we have n't got to the end yet, — a tooth to-day and to-morrow an ear; if they could find a sauce for our livers they 'd eat 'em as they do a calf's!" said old Bonnébault, whose threatening face was turned in profile to the general as he passed her, though in the twinkling of an eye she changed its expression to one of hypocritical softness and submission as she hastened to make him a profound curtsey.

"So you are gleaning, are you, though my wife helps you to earn so much money?"

"Hey! my dear gentleman, may God preserve you in good health! but, don't you see, my grandson squanders all I earn, and I 'm forced to scratch up a little wheat to get bread in the winter, — yes, yes, I glean just a bit; it all helps."

The gleaning proved of little profit to the gleaners.

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The farmers and tenant-farmers, finding themselves backed up, took care that their wheat was well reaped, and superintended the making of the sheaves and their safe removal, so that little or none of the pillage of former years could take place.

Accustomed to get a good proportion of wheat in their gleaning, the false as well as the true poor, forgetting the count's pardon at Conches, now felt a deep but silent anger against him, which was aggravated by the Tonsards, Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Laroche, Vaudoyer, Godain, and their adherents. Matters went worse still after the vintage; for the gathering of the refuse grape was not allowed until Sibilet had examined the vines with extreme care. This last restriction exasperated these sons of the soil to the highest pitch; but when so great a social distance separates the angered class from the threatened class, words and threats are lost; nothing comes to the surface or is perceived but facts; meantime the malcontents work underground like moles.

The fair of Soulanges took place as usual quite peacefully, except for certain jarrings between the leading society and the second-class society of Soulanges, brought about by the despotism of the queen, who could not tolerate the empire founded and established over the heart of the brilliant Lupin by the beautiful Euphémie Plissoud, for she herself laid permanent claim to his fickle fervors.

The count and countess did not appear at the fair nor at the Tivoli fête; and that, again, was counted a wrong by the Soudrys, the Gaubertins, and their adherents; it was pride, it was disdain, said the Soudry salon. During this time the countess was filling the

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void caused by Émile's return to Paris with the immense interest and pleasure all fine souls take in the good they are doing, or think they do; and the count, for his part, applied himself no less zealously to changes and ameliorations in the management of his estate, which he expected and believed would modify and benefit the condition of the people and hence their characters. Madame de Montcornet, assisted by the advice and experience of the Abbé Brossette, came, little by little, to have a thorough and statistical knowledge of all the poor families of the district, their respective condition, their wants, their means of subsistence, and the sort of help she must give to each to obtain work so as not to make them lazy or idle.

The countess had placed Geneviève Niseron, La Péchina, in a convent at Auxerre, under pretext of having her taught to sew that she might employ her in her own house, but really to save her from the shameful attempts of Nicolas Tonsard, whom Rigou had managed to save from the conscription. The countess also believed that a religious education, the cloister, and monastic supervision, would subdue the ardent passions of the precocious little girl, whose Montenegrin blood seemed to her like a threatening flame which might one day set fire to the domestic happiness of her faithful Olympe.

So all was peace at the château des Aigues. The count, misled by Sibilet, reassured by Michaud, congratulated himself on his firmness, and thanked his wife for having contributed by her benevolence to the immense comfort of their tranquillity. The question of the sale of his timber was laid aside till he should go to Paris and arrange with the dealers. He



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had not the slightest notion of how to do business, and he was in total ignorance of the power wielded by Gaubertin over the current of the Yonne, — the main line of conveyance which supplied the timber of the Paris market.

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## VII.

### THE GREYHOUND.

Towards the middle of September Émile Blondet, who had gone to Paris to publish a book, returned to refresh himself at Les Aigues and to think over the work he was planning for the winter. At Les Aigues, the loving and sincere qualities which succeed adolescence in a young man's soul reappeared in the used-up journalist.

"What a fine soul!" was the comment of the count and the countess when they spoke of him.

Men who are accustomed to move among the abysses of social nature, to understand all and to repress nothing, make themselves an oasis in the heart, where they forget their perversities and those of others; they become within that narrow and sacred circle, — saints; there, they possess the delicacy of women, they give themselves up to a momentary realization of their ideal, they become angelic for some one being who adores them, and they are not playing comedy; they join their soul to innocence, so to speak; they feel the need to brush off the mud, to heal their sores, to bathe their wounds. At Les Aigues Émile Blondet was without bitterness, without sarcasm, almost without wit; he made no epigrams, he was gentle as a lamb, and platonically tender.

"He is such a good young fellow that I miss him terribly when he is not here," said the general. "I do

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wish he could make a fortune and not lead that Paris life of his."

Never did the glorious landscape and park of Les Aigues seem as luxuriantly beautiful as it did just then. The first autumn days were beginning, when the earth, languid from her procreations and delivered of her products, exhales the delightful odors of vegetation. At this time the woods, especially, are delicious; they begin to take the russet warmth of Sienna earth, and the green-bronze tones which form the lovely tapestry beneath which they hide from the cold of winter.

Nature, having shown herself in springtime jaunty and joyous as a brunette glowing with hope, becomes in autumn sad and gentle as a blonde full of pensive memories; the turf yellows, the last flowers unfold their pale corollas, the white-eyed daisies are fewer in the grass, only their crimson calices are seen. Yellows abound; the shady places are lighter for lack of leafage, but darker in tone; the sun, already oblique, slides its furtive orange rays athwart them, leaving long luminous traces which rapidly disappear, like the train of a woman's gown as she bids adieu.

On the morning of the second day after his arrival, Émile was at a window of his bedroom, which opened upon a terrace with a balustrade from which a noble view could be seen. This balcony ran the whole length of the apartments of the countess, on the side of the château towards the forests and the Blangy landscape. The pond, which would have been called a lake were Les Aigues nearer Paris, was partly in view, so was the long canal; the Silver-spring, coming from above the pavilion of the Rendezvous, crossed the lawn with its sheeny ribbon, reflecting the yellow sand.

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Beyond the park, between the village and the walls, lay the cultivated parts of Blangy, — meadows where the cows were grazing, small properties surrounded by hedges, filled with fruit of all kinds, nut and apple trees. By way of frame, the heights on which the noble forest-trees were ranged, tier above tier, closed in the scene. The countess had come out in her slippers to look at the flowers in her balcony, which were sending up their morning fragrance; she wore a cambric dressing-gown, beneath which the rosy tints of her white shoulders could be seen; a coquettish little cap was placed in a bewitching manner on her hair, which escaped it recklessly; her little feet showed their warm flesh color through the transparent stockings; the cambric gown, unconfined at the waist, floated open as the breeze took it, and showed an embroidered petticoat.

"Oh! are you there?" she said.

"Yes."

"What are you looking at?"

"A pretty question! You have torn me from the contemplation of Nature. Tell me, countess, will you go for a walk in the woods this morning before breakfast?"

"What an idea! You know I have a horror of walking."

"We will only walk a little way; I'll drive you in the tilbury and take Joseph to hold the horses. You have never once set foot in your forest; and I have just noticed something very curious, a phenomenon; there are spots where the tree-tops are of the color of Florentine bronze, the leaves are dried —"

"Well, I'll dress."

"Oh, if you do, we can't get off for two hours. Take

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a shawl, put on a bonnet, and boots ; that 's all you want. I shall tell them to harness."

" You always make me do what you want ; I 'll be ready in a minute."

" General," said Blondet, waking the count, who grumbled and turned over, like a man who wants his morning sleep. " We are going for a drive ; won't you come ? "

A quarter of an hour later the tilbury was slowly rolling along the park avenue, followed by a liveried groom on horseback.

The morning was a September morning. The dark blue of the sky burst forth here and there from the gray of the clouds, which seemed the sky itself, the ether seeming to be the accessory ; long lines of ultramarine lay upon the horizon, but in strata, which alternated with other lines like sand-bars ; these tones changed and grew green at the level of the forests. The earth beneath this overhanging mantle was moistly warm, like a woman when she rises ; it exhaled sweet, luscious odors, which yet were wild, not civilized, — the scent of cultivation was added to the scents of the woods. Just then the Angelus was ringing at Blangy, and the sounds of the bell, mingling with the wild concert of the forest, gave harmony to the silence. Here and there were rising vapors, white, diaphanous.

Seeing these lovely preparations of Nature, the fancy had seized Olympe Michaud to accompany her husband, who had to give an order to a keeper whose house was not far off. The Soulanges doctor advised her to walk as long as she could do so without fatigue ; she was afraid of the midday heat and went out only in the early morning or evening. Michaud now took her with

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him, and they were followed by the dog he loved best, — a handsome greyhound, mouse-colored with white spots, greedy, like all greyhounds, and as full of vices as most animals who know they are loved and petted.

So, when the tilbury reached the pavilion of the Rendezvous, the countess, who stopped to ask how Madame Michaud felt, was told she had gone into the forest with her husband.

"Such weather inspires everybody," said Blondet, turning his horse at hazard into one of the six avenues of the forest; "Joseph, you know the woods, don't you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

And away they went. The avenue they took happened to be one of the most delightful in the forest; it soon turned and grew narrower, and presently became a winding way, on which the sunshine flickered through rifts in the leafy roof, and where the breeze brought odors of lavender, and thyme, and the wild mint, and that of falling leaves, which sighed as they fell. Dewdrops on the trees and on the grass were scattered like seeds by the passing of the light carriage; the occupants as they rolled along caught glimpses of the mysterious visions of the woods, — those cool depths, where the verdure is moist and dark, where the light softens as it fades; those white-birch glades o'ertopped by some centennial tree, the Hercules of the forest; those glorious assemblages of knotted, mossy trunks, whitened and furrowed, and the banks of delicate wild plants and fragile flowers which grow between a woodland road and the forest. The brooks sang. Truly there is a nameless pleasure in driving a woman along the ups and downs of a slippery way carpeted with moss, where she

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pretends to be afraid or really is so, and you are conscious that she is drawing closer to you, letting you feel, voluntarily or involuntarily, the cool moisture of her arm, the weight of her round, white shoulder, though she merely smiles when told that she hinders you in driving. The horse seems to know the secret of these interruptions, and he looks about him from right to left.

It was a new sight to the countess; this nature so vigorous in its effects, so little seen and yet so grand, threw her into a languid revery; she leaned back in the tilbury and yielded herself up to the pleasure of being there with Émile; her eyes were charmed, her heart spoke, she answered to the inward voice that harmonized with hers. He, too, glanced at her furtively; he enjoyed that dreamy meditation, while the ribbons of the bonnet floated on the morning breeze with the silky curls of the golden hair. In consequence of going they knew not where, they presently came to a locked gate, of which they had not the key. Joseph was called up, but neither had he a key.

"Never mind, let us walk; Joseph can take care of the tilbury; we shall easily find it again."

Émile and the countess plunged into the forest, and soon reached a small interior cleared space, such as is often met with in the woods. Twenty years earlier the charcoal-burners had made it their kiln, and the place still remained open, quite a large circumference having been burned over. But during those twenty years Nature had made herself a garden of flowers, a blooming *parterre* for her own enjoyment, just as an artist gives himself the delight of painting a picture for his own happiness. The enchanting spot was surrounded by fine trees, whose tops hung over like vast fringes and made

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a daïs above this flowery couch where slept the goddess. The charcoal-burners had followed a path to a pond, always full of water. The path is there still; it invites you to step into it by a turn full of mystery; then suddenly it stops short and you come upon a bank where a thousand roots run down to the water and make a sort of canvas in the air. This hidden pond has a narrow grassy edge, where a few willows and poplars lend their fickle shade to a bank of turf which some lazy or pensive charcoal-burner must have made for his enjoyment. The frogs hop about, the teal bathe in the pond, the water-fowl come and go, a hare starts; you are the master of this delicious bath, decorated with iris and bulrushes. Above your head the trees take many attitudes; here the trunks twine down like boa-constrictors, there the beeches stand erect as a Greek column. The snails and the slugs move peacefully about. A tench shows its gills, a squirrel looks at you; and at last, after Émile and the countess, tired with her walk, were seated, a bird, but I know not what bird it was, sang its autumn song, its farewell song, to which the other songsters listened, — a song welcome to love, and heard by every organ of the being.

"What silence!" said the countess, with emotion and in a whisper, as if not to trouble this deep peace.

They looked at the green patches on the water, — worlds where life was organizing; they pointed to the lizard playing in the sun and escaping at their approach, — behavior which has won him the title of "the friend of man." "Proving, too, how well he knows him," said Émile. They watched the frogs, who, less distrustful, returned to the surface of the pond, winking their carbuncle eyes as they sat upon the water-cresses.

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The sweet and simple poetry of Nature permeated these two souls surfeited with the conventional things of life, and filled them with contemplative emotion. Suddenly Blondet shuddered. Turning to the countess he said, —

"Did you hear that?"

"What?" she asked.

"A curious noise."

"Ah, you literary men who live in your studies and know nothing of the country! that is only a woodpecker tapping a tree. I dare say you don't even know the most curious fact in the history of that bird. As soon as he has given his tap, and he gives millions to pierce an oak, he flies behind the tree to see if he is yet through it; and he does this every instant."

"The noise I heard, dear instructress of natural history, was not a noise made by an animal; there was evidence of mind in it, and that proclaims a man."

The countess was seized with a panic, and she darted back through the wild flower-garden, seeking the path by which to leave the forest.

"What is the matter?" cried Blondet, rushing after her.

"I thought I saw eyes," she said, when they regained the path through which they had reached the charcoal-burner's open.

Just then they heard the low death-rattle of a creature whose throat was suddenly cut, and the countess, with her fears redoubled, fled so quickly that Blondet could scarcely follow her. She ran like a will-o'-the-wisp, and did not listen to Blondet who called to her, "You are mistaken." On she ran, and Émile with her, till they suddenly came upon Michaud and his wife,

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who were walking along arm-in-arm. Émile was panting and the countess out of breath, and it was some time before they could speak; then they explained. Michaud joined Blondet in laughing at the countess's terror; then the bailiff showed the two wanderers the way to find the tilbury. When they reached the gate Madame Michaud called, "Prince!"

"Prince! Prince!" called the bailiff; then he whistled, — but no greyhound.

Émile mentioned the curious noise that began their adventure.

"My wife heard that noise," said Michaud, "and I laughed at her."

"They have killed Prince!" exclaimed the countess. "I am sure of it; they killed him by cutting his throat at one blow. What I heard was the groan of a dying animal."

"The devil!" cried Michaud; "the matter must be cleared up."

Émile and the bailiff left the two ladies with Joseph and the horses, and returned to the wild garden of the open. They went down the bank to the pond; looked everywhere along the slope, but found no clue. Blondet jumped back first, and as he did so he saw, in a thicket which stood on higher ground, one of those trees he had noticed in the morning with withered heads. He showed it to Michaud, and proposed to go to it. The two sprang forward in a straight line across the forest, avoiding the trunks and going round the matted tangles of brier and holly until they found the tree.

"It is a fine elm," said Michaud, "but there's a worm in it, — a worm which gnaws round the bark close to the roots."

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He stopped and took up a bit of the bark, saying: "See how they work."

"You have a great many worms in this forest," said Blondet.

Just then Michaud noticed a red spot; a moment more and he saw the head of his greyhound. He sighed.

"The scoundrels!" he said. "Madame was right."

Michaud and Blondet examined the body and found, just as the countess had said, that some one had cut the greyhound's throat. To prevent his barking he had been decoyed with a bit of meat, which was still between his tongue and his palate.

"Poor brute; he died of self-indulgence."

"Like all princes," said Blondet.

"Some one, whoever it is, has just gone, fearing that we might catch him or her," said Michaud. "A serious offence has been committed. But for all that, I see no branches about and no lopped trees."

Blondet and the bailiff began a cautious search, looking at each spot where they set their feet before setting them. Presently Blondet pointed to a tree beneath which the grass was flattened down and two hollows made.

"Some one knelt there, and it must have been a woman, for a man would not have left such a quantity of flattened grass around the impression of his two knees; yes, see! that is the outline of a petticoat."

The bailiff, after examining the base of the tree, found the beginning of a hole beneath the bark; but he did not find the worm with the tough skin, shiny and squamous, covered with brown specks, ending in a tail not unlike that of a cockchafer, and having also the latter's

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head, antennæ, and the two vigorous hooks or shears with which the creature cuts into the wood.

"My dear fellow," said Blondet, "now I understand the enormous number of *dead* trees that I noticed this morning from the terrace of the château, and which brought me here to find out the cause of the phenomenon. Worms are at work; but they are no other than your peasants.

The bailiff gave vent to an oath and rushed off, followed by Blondet, to rejoin the countess, whom he requested to take his wife home with her. Then he jumped on Joseph's horse, leaving the man to return on foot, and disappeared with great rapidity to cut off the retreat of the woman who had killed his dog, hoping to catch her with the bloody bill-hook in her hand and the tool used to make the incisions in the bark of the tree.

"Let us go and tell the general at once, before he breakfasts," cried the countess; "he might die of anger."

"I'll prepare him," said Blondet.

"They have killed the dog," said Olympe, in tears.

"You loved the poor greyhound, dear, enough to weep for him?" said the countess.

"I think of Prince as a warning; I fear some danger to my husband."

"How they have ruined this beautiful morning for us," said the countess, with an adorable little pout.

"How they have ruined the country," said Olympe, gravely.

They met the general near the château.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"You shall know in a minute," said Blondet, myste-

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riously, as he helped the countess and Madame Michaud to alight. A moment more and the two gentlemen were alone on the terrace of the apartments.

"You have plenty of moral strength, general; you won't put yourself in a passion, will you?"

"No," said the general; "but come to the point or I shall think you are making fun of me."

"Do you see those trees with dead leaves?"

"Yes."

"Do you see those others that are wilting?"

"Yes."

"Well, every one of them has been killed by the peasants you think you have won over by your benefits."

And Blondet related the events of the morning.

The general was so pale that Blondet was frightened.

"Come, curse, swear, be furious! your self-control may hurt you more than anger!"

"I'll go and smoke," said the general, turning toward the kiosk.

During breakfast Michaud came in; he had found no one. Sibilet, whom the count had sent for, came also.

"Monsieur Sibilet, and you, Monsieur Michaud, are to make it known, cautiously, that I will pay a thousand francs to whoever will arrest *in the act* the person or persons who are killing my trees; they must also discover the instrument with which the work is done, and where it was bought. I have settled upon a plan."

"Those people never betray one another," said Sibilet, "if the crime done is for their benefit and premeditated. There is no denying that this diabolical business has been planned, carefully planned and contrived."

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"Yes, but a thousand francs means a couple of acres of land."

"We can try," said Sibilet; "fifteen hundred francs might buy you a traitor, especially if you promise secrecy."

"Very good; but let us act as if we suspected nothing, I especially; if not, we shall be the victims of some collusion; one has to be as wary with these brigands as with the enemy in war."

"But the enemy is here," said Blondet.

Sibilet threw him the furtive glance of a man who understood the meaning of the words, and then he withdrew.

"I don't like your Sibilet," said Blondet, when he had seen the steward leave the house. "That man is playing false."

"Up to this time he has done nothing I could complain of," said the general.

Blondet went off to write letters. He had lost the careless gayety of his first arrival, and was now uneasy and preoccupied; but he had no vague presentiments like those of Madame Michaud; he was, rather, in full expectation of certain foreseen misfortunes. He said to himself, "This affair will come to some bad end; and if the general does not take decisive action and will not abandon a battle-field where he is overwhelmed by numbers there must be a catastrophe; and who knows who will come out safe and sound, — perhaps neither he nor his wife. Good God! that adorable little creature! so devoted, so perfect! how can he expose her thus? He thinks he loves her! Well, I'll share their danger, and if I can't save them I'll suffer with them."

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## VIII.

### RURAL VIRTUE.

THAT night Marie Tonsard was stationed on the road to Soulanges, sitting on the rail of a culvert waiting for Bonnébault, who had spent the day, as usual, at the Café de la Paix. She heard him coming at some distance, and his step told her that he was drunk, and she knew also that he had lost money, for he always sang if he won.

"Is that you, Bonnébault?"

"Yes, my girl."

"What 's the matter?"

"I owe twenty-five francs, and they may wring my neck twenty-five times before I can pay them."

"Well, I know how you can get five hundred," she said in his ear.

"Oh! by killing a man; but I prefer to live."

"Hold your tongue. Vaudoyer will give us five hundred francs if you will let him catch your mother at a tree."

"I 'd rather kill a man than sell my mother. There 's your old grandmother; why don't you sell her?"

"If I tried to, my father would get angry and stop the trick."

"That 's true. Well, anyhow, my mother sha'n't go to prison, poor old thing! She cooks my food and keeps me in clothes, I 'm sure I don't know how. Go

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to prison, — and through me! I should n't have any bowels within me; no, no! And for fear any one else should sell her, I 'll tell her this very night not to kill any more trees."

"Well, my father may say and do what he likes, but I shall tell him there are five hundred francs to be had, and perhaps he 'll ask my grandmother if she 'll earn them. They 'll never put an old woman seventy-eight years of age in prison, — though, to be sure, she 'd be better off there than in her garret."

"Five hundred francs! well, yes; I 'll speak to my mother," said Bonnébault, "and if it suits her to give 'em to me, I 'll let her have part to take to prison. She could knit, and amuse herself; and she 'd be well fed and lodged, and have less trouble than she has at Conches. Well, to-morrow, my girl, I 'll see you about it; I have n't time to stop now."

The next morning at daybreak Bonnébault and his old mother knocked at the door of the Grand-I-Vert. Mother Tonsard was the only person up.

"Marie!" called Bonnébault, "that matter is settled."

"You mean about the trees?" said Mother Tonsard; "yes, it is all settled; I 've taken it."

"Nonsense!" cried Mother Bonnébault, "my son has got the promise of an acre of land from Monsieur Rigou —"

The two old women squabbled as to which of them should be sold by her children. The noise of the quarrel woke up the household. Tonsard and Bonnébault took sides for their respective mothers.

"Pull straws," suggested Tonsard's wife.

The short straw gave it in favor of the tavern.



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Three days later, in the forest of Ville-aux-Fayes at daybreak, the gendarmes arrested old Mother Tonsard caught *in flagrante delicto* by the bailiff, his assistants, and the field-keeper, with a rusty file which served to tear the tree, and a chisel, used by the delinquent to scoop round the bark just as the insect bores its way. The indictment stated that sixty trees thus destroyed were found within a radius of five hundred feet. The old woman was sent to Auxerre, the case coming under the jurisdiction of the assize-court.

Michaud could not refrain from saying when he discovered Mother Tonsard at the foot of the tree: "These are the persons on whom the general and Madame la comtesse have showered benefits! Faith, if Madame would only listen to me, she would n't give that dowry to the Tonsard girl, who is more worthless than her grandmother."

The old woman raised her gray eyes and darted a venomous look at Michaud. When the count learned who the guilty person was, he forbade his wife to give the money to Catherine Tonsard.

"Monsieur le comte is perfectly right," said Sibilet. "I know that Godain bought that land three days before Catherine came to speak to Madame. She is quite capable, that girl, of pretending she is with child, to get the money; very likely Godain has had nothing to do with it."

"What a community!" said Blondet; "the scoundrels of Paris are saints by comparison."

"Ah, monsieur," said Sibilet, "self-interest makes people guilty of horrors everywhere. Do you know who betrayed the old woman?"

"No."

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"Her granddaughter Marie; she was jealous of her sister's marriage, and to get the money for her own —"

"It is awful!" said the count. "Why! they'd murder!"

"Oh yes," said Sibilet, "for a very small sum. They care so little for life, those people; they hate to have to work all their lives. Ah monsieur, queer things happen in country places, as queer as those of Paris, — but you will never believe it."

"Let us be kind and benevolent," said the countess.

The evening after the arrest Bonnébault came to the tavern of the Grand-I-Vert, where all the Tonsard family were in great jubilation. "Oh yes, yes!" said he, "make the most of your rejoicing; but I've just heard from Vaudoyer that the countess, to punish you, withdraws the thousand francs promised to Godain; her husband won't let her give them."

"It's that villain of a Michaud that has put him up to it," said Tonsard. "My mother heard him say he would; she told me at Ville-aux-Fayes where I went to carry her some money and her clothes. Well; let that countess keep her money! our five hundred francs shall help Godain buy the land; and we'll revenge ourselves for this thing. Ha! Michaud meddles with our private matters, does he? it will bring him more harm than good. What business is it of his, I'd like to know? let him keep to the woods! It's he who is at the bottom of all this trouble — he found the clue that day my mother cut the throat of his dog. Suppose I were to meddle in the affairs of the château? Suppose I were to tell the general that his wife is off walking in the woods before he is up in the morning, with a young man."

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"The general, the general!" sneered Courtecuisse; "they can do what they like with him. But it's Michaud who stirs him up, the mischief-maker! a fellow who don't know his business; in my day, things went differently."

"Ah!" said Tonsard, "those were the good days for all of us — were n't they, Vaudoyer?"

"Yes," said the latter, "and the fact is that if Michaud were got rid of we should be left in peace."

"Enough said," replied Tonsard. "We 'll talk of that later — by moonlight — in the open field."

Towards the end of October the countess returned to Paris, leaving the general at Les Aigues. He was not to rejoin her until some time later, but she did not wish to lose the first night of the Italian Opera, and moreover she was lonely and bored; she missed Émile, who was recalled by his avocations, for he had helped her to pass the hours when the general was scouring the country or attending to business.

November was a true winter month, gray and gloomy, a mixture of snow and rain, frost and thaw. The trial of Mother Tonsard had required witnesses at Auxerre, and Michaud had given his testimony. Monsieur Rigou had interested himself for the old woman, and employed a lawyer on her behalf who relied in his defence on the absence of disinterested witnesses; but the testimony of Michaud and his assistants and the field-keeper was found to outweigh this objection. Tonsard's mother was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and the lawyer said to her son: —

"It was Michaud's testimony which got her that."

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## IX.

### THE CATASTROPHE.

One Saturday evening, Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Godain, Tonsard, his daughters, wife, and Père Fourchon, also Vaudoyer and several mechanics were supping at the tavern. The moon was at half-full, the first snow had melted, and frost had just stiffened the ground so that a man's step left no traces. They were eating a stew of hare caught in a trap; all were drinking and laughing. It was the day after the wedding of Catherine and Godain, and the wedded pair were to be conducted to their new home, which was not far from that of Courtecuisse; for when Rigou sold an acre of land it was sure to be isolated and close to the woods. Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer had brought their guns to accompany the bride. The neighborhood was otherwise fast asleep; not a light was to be seen; none but the wedding party were awake, but they made noise enough. In the midst of it the old Bonnébault woman entered, and every one looked at her.

"I think she is going to lie-in," she whispered in Tonsard's ear. "*He* has saddled his horse and is going for the doctor at Soulanges."

"Sit down," said Tonsard, giving her his place at the table, and going himself to lie on a bench.

Just then the gallop of a horse passing rapidly along the road was heard. Tonsard, Courtecuisse, and Vau-

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doyer went out hurriedly, and saw Michaud on his way to the village.

"He knows what he's about," said Courtecuisse; "he came down by the terrace and he means to go by Blangy and the road, — it's the safest way."

"Yes," said Tonsard, "but he will bring the doctor back with him."

"He won't find him," said Courtecuisse, "the doctor has been sent for to Conches for the postmistress."

"Then he'll go from Soulanges to Conches by the mail-road; that's shortest."

"And safest too, for us," said Courtecuisse, "there's a fine moon, and there are no keepers on the road as there are in the woods; one can hear much farther; and down there, by the pavilions, behind the hedges, just where they join the little wood, one can aim at a man from behind, like a rabbit, at five hundred feet."

"It will be half-past eleven before he comes past there," said Tonsard, "it will take him half an hour to go to Soulanges and as much more to get back, — but look here! suppose Monsieur Gourdon were on the road?"

"Don't trouble about that," said Courtecuisse, "I'll stand ten minutes away from you to the right on the road towards Blangy, and Vaudoyer will be ten minutes away on your left towards Conches; if anything comes along, the mail, or the gendarmes, or whatever it is, we'll fire a shot into the ground, — a muffled sound, you'll know it."

"But suppose I miss him?" said Tonsard.

"He's right," said Courtecuisse, "I'm the best shot; Vaudoyer, I'll go with you; Bonnébault may

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watch in my place; he can give a cry; that 's easier heard and less suspicious."

All three returned to the tavern and the wedding festivities went on; but about eleven o'clock Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard, and Bonnébault went out, carrying their guns, though none of the women took any notice of them. They came back in about three-quarters of an hour, and sat drinking till past one o'clock. Tonsard's girls and their mother and the old Bonnébault woman had plied the miller, the mechanics, and the two peasants, as well as Fourchon, with so much drink that they were all on the ground and snoring when the four men left the tavern; on their return, the sleepers were shaken and roused, and every one seemed to them, as before, in his place.

While this orgy was going on Michaud's household was a scene of mortal anxiety. Olympe had felt false pains, and her husband, thinking she was about to be delivered, rode off instantly in haste for the doctor. But the poor woman's pains ceased as soon as she realized that Michaud was gone; for her mind was so preoccupied by the danger her husband ran at that hour of the night, in a lawless region filled with determined foes, that the anguish of her soul was powerful enough to deaden and momentarily subdue those of the body. In vain her servant-woman declared her fears were imaginary; she seemed not to comprehend a word that was said to her, and sat by the fire in her bed-chamber listening to every sound. In her terror, which increased every moment, she had the man wakened, meaning to give him some order which still she did not give. At last, the poor woman wandered up and down, coming and going in feverish agitation;

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she looked out of all the windows and opened them in spite of the cold; then she went downstairs and opened the door into the courtyard, looking out and listening. "Nothing! nothing!" she said. Then she went up again in despair. About a quarter past twelve, she cried out: "Here he is! I hear the horse!" Again she went down, followed by the man who went to open the iron gate of the courtyard. "It is strange," she said, "that he should return by the Conches woods!"

As she spoke she stood still, horrorstruck, motionless, voiceless. The man shared her terror, for, in the furious gallop of the horse, the clang of the empty stirrups, the neigh of the frightened animal, there was something, they scarcely knew what, of unspeakable warning. Soon, too soon for the unhappy wife, the horse reached the gate, panting and sweating, but alone; he had broken the bridle, no doubt by entangling it. Olympe gazed with haggard eyes at the servant as he opened the gate; she saw the horse, and then, without a word, she ran to the château like a madwoman; when she reached it she fell to the ground beneath the general's windows crying out: "Monsieur, they have murdered him!"

The cry was so terrible it awoke the count; he rang violently, bringing the whole household to their feet; and the groans of Madame Michaud, who as she lay on the ground, gave birth to a child that died in being born, brought the general and all the servants about her. They raised the poor dying woman, who expired, saying to the general: "They have murdered him!"

"Joseph!" cried the count to his valet, "go for the doctor; there may yet be time to save her. No, better bring the curate; the poor woman is dead, and

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her child too. My God! my God! how thankful I am that my wife is not here. And you," he said to the gardener, ".go and find out what has happened."

"I can tell you," said the pavilion servant, coming up, "Monsieur Michaud's horse has come back alone, the reins broken, his legs bloody; and there 's a spot of blood on the saddle."

"What can be done at this time of night?" cried the count. "Call up Groison, send for the keepers, saddle the horses; we 'll beat the country."

By daybreak, eight persons — the count, Groison, the three keepers, and two gendarmes sent from Soulanges with their sergeant — searched the country. It was not till the middle of the morning that they found the body of the bailiff in a copse between the mail-road and the smaller road leading to Ville-aux-Fayes, at the end of the park of Les Aigues, not far from Conches. Two gendarmes started, one to Ville-aux-Fayes for the prosecuting attorney, the other to Soulanges for the justice of the peace. Meantime the general, assisted by the sergeant, noted down the facts. They found on the road, just above the two pavilions, the print of the stamping of the horse's feet as he reared, and the traces of his frightened gallop from there to the first opening into the woods above the hedge. The horse, no longer guided, turned into the wood-path. Michaud's hat was found there. The animal evidently took the nearest way to reach his stable. The bailiff had a ball through his back which broke the spine.

Groison and the sergeant studied the ground around the spot where the horse reared (which might be called, in judicial language, the theatre of the crime) with remarkable sagacity, but without obtaining any

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clue. The earth was too frozen to show the footprints of the murderer, and all they found was the paper of a cartridge. When the attorney and the judge and Monsieur Gourdon, the doctor, arrived and raised the body to make the autopsy, it was found that the ball, which corresponded with the fragments of the wad, was an ammunition ball, evidently from a military musket; and no such musket existed in the district of Blangy. The judge and Monsieur Soudry the attorney, who came that evening to the château, thought it best to collect all the facts and await events. The same opinion was expressed by the sergeant and the lieutenant of the gendarmerie.

"It is impossible that it can be anything but a planned attack on the part of the peasants," said the sergeant; "but there are two districts, Conches and Blangy, in each of which there are five or six persons capable of being concerned in the murder. The one that I suspect most, Tonsard, passed the night carousing in the Grand-I-Vert; but your assistant, general, the miller Langlumé, was there, and he says that Tonsard did not leave the tavern. They were all so drunk they could not stand; they took the bride home at half-past one; and the return of the horse proves that Michaud was murdered between eleven o'clock and midnight. At a quarter past ten Groison saw the whole company assembled at table, and Monsieur Michaud passed there on his way to Soulanges, which he reached at eleven. His horse reared between the two pavilions on the mail-road; but he may have been shot before reaching Blangy and yet have stayed in the saddle for some little time. We should have to issue warrants for at least twenty persons and arrest them; but I know those peasants, and so do these gentlemen;

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you might keep them a year in prison and you would get nothing out of them but denials. What could you do with all those who were at Tonsard's?"

They sent for Langlumé, the miller, and the assistant of General Montcornet as mayor; he related what had taken place in the tavern, and gave the names of all present; none had gone out except for a minute or two into the courtyard. He had left the room for a moment with Tonsard about eleven o'clock; they had spoken of the moon and the weather, and heard nothing. At two o'clock the whole party had taken the bride and bridegroom to their own house.

The general arranged with the sergeant, the lieutenant, and the civil authorities to send to Paris for the cleverest detective in the service of the police, who should come to the château as a workman, and behave so ill as to be dismissed; he should then take to drinking and frequent the Grand-I-Vert and remain in the neighborhood in the character of an ill-wisher to the general. The best plan they could follow was to watch and wait for a momentary revelation, and then make the most of it.

"If I have to spend twenty thousand francs I 'll discover the murderer of my poor Michaud," the general was never weary of saying.

He went off with that idea in his head, and returned from Paris in the month of January with one of the shrewdest satellites of the chief of the detective police, who was brought down ostensibly to do some work to the interior of the château. The man was discovered poaching. He was arrested, and turned off, and soon after — early in February — the general rejoined his wife in Paris.

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## X.

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE VANQUISHED.

One evening in the month of May, when the fine weather had come and the Parisians had returned to Les Aigues, Monsieur de Troisville, — who had been persuaded to accompany his daughter, — Blondet, the Abbé Brossette, the general, and the sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes, who was on a visit to the château, were all playing either whist or chess. It was about half-past eleven o'clock when Joseph entered and told his master that the worthless poaching workman who had been dismissed wanted to see him, — something about a bill which he said the general still owed him. "He is very drunk," added Joseph.

"Very good, I 'll go and speak to him."

The general went out upon the lawn to some distance from the house.

"Monsieur le comte," said the detective, "nothing will ever be got out of these people. All that I have been able to gather is that if you continue to stay in this place and try to make the peasants renounce the pilfering habits which Mademoiselle Laguerre allowed them to acquire, they will shoot you as well as your bailiff. There is no use in my staying here; for they distrust me even more than they do the keepers."

The count paid his spy, who left the place the next day, and his departure justified the suspicions enter-

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tained about him by the accomplices in the death of Michaud.

When the general returned to the salon there were such signs of emotion upon his face that his wife asked him, anxiously, what news he had just heard.

"Dear wife," he said, "I don't want to frighten you, and yet it is right you should know that Michaud's death was intended as a warning to us to leave this part of the country."

"If I were in your place," said Monsieur de Troisville, "I would not leave it. I myself have had just such difficulties in Normandy, only under another form; I persisted in my course, and now everything goes well."

"Monsieur le marquis," said the sub-prefect, "Normandy and Burgundy are two very different regions. The grape heats the blood far more than the apple. We know much less of law and legal proceedings; we live among the woods; the large industries are unknown among us; we are still savages. If I might give my advice to Monsieur le comte it would be to sell this estate and put the money in the Funds; he would double his income and have no anxieties. If he likes living in the country he could buy a château near Paris with a park as beautiful as that of Les Aigues, surrounded by walls, where no one can annoy him, and where he can let all his farms and receive the money in good bank-bills, and have no law suits from one year's end to another. He could come and go in three or four hours, and Monsieur Blondet and Monsieur le marquis would not be so often away from you, Madame la comtesse."

"I, retreat before the peasantry when I did not recoil before the Danube!" cried the general.

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"Yes, but what became of your cuirassiers?" asked Blondet.

"Such a fine estate!"

"It will sell to-day for over two millions."

"The château alone must have cost that," remarked Monsieur de Troisville.

"One of the best properties in a circumference of sixty miles," said the sub-prefect; "but you can find a better near Paris."

"How much income does one get from two millions?" asked the countess.

"Now-a-days, about eighty thousand francs," replied Blondet.

"Les Aigues does not bring in, all told, more than thirty thousand," said the countess; "and lately you have been at such immense expense, — you have surrounded the woods this year with ditches.

"You could get," added Blondet, "a royal château for four hundred thousand francs near Paris. In these days people buy the follies of others."

"I thought you cared for Les Aigues!" said the count to his wife.

"Don't you feel that I care a thousand times more for your life?" she replied. "Besides, ever since the death of my poor Olympe and Michaud's murder the country is odious to me; all the faces I meet seem to wear a treacherous or threatening expression."

The next evening the sub-prefect, having ended his visit at the château, was welcomed in the salon of Monsieur Gaubertin at Ville-aux-Fayes in these words: —

"Well, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, so you have returned from Les Aigues?"

"Yes," answered the sub-prefect with a little air of

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triumph and a look of tender regard at Mademoiselle Élise, "and I am very much afraid we may lose the general; he talks of selling his property —"

"Monsieur Gaubertin, I speak for my pavilion. I can no longer endure the noise, the dust of Ville-aux-Fayes; like a poor imprisoned bird I gasp for the air of the fields, the woodland breezes," said Madame Isaure, in a lackadaisical voice, with her eyes half-closed and her head bending to her left shoulder as she played carelessly with the long curls of her blond hair.

"Pray be prudent, madame!" said her husband in a low voice; "your indiscretions will not help me to buy the pavilion. Then, turning to the sub-prefect, he added, "Have n't they yet discovered the men who were concerned in the murder of the bailiff?"

"It seems not," replied the sub-prefect.

"That will injure the sale of Les Aigues," said Gaubertin to the company generally, "I know very well that I would not buy the place. The peasantry over there are such a bad set of people; even in the days of Mademoiselle Laguerre I had trouble with them, and God knows she let them do as they liked."

At the end of the month of May the general still gave no sign that he intended to sell Les Aigues; in fact, he was undecided. One night, about ten o'clock, he was returning from the forest through one of the six avenues that led to the pavilion of the Rendezvous. He dismissed the keeper who accompanied him, as he was then so near the château. At a turn of the road a man armed with a gun came from behind a bush.

"General," he said, "this is the third time I have had you at the end of my barrel, and the third time that I give you your life."

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"Why do you want to kill me, Bonnébault?" said the general, without showing the least emotion.

"Faith, if I don't, somebody else will; but I, you see, I like the men who served the Emperor, and I can't make up my mind to shoot you like a partridge. Don't question me, for I 'll tell you nothing ; but you 've got enemies, powerful enemies, cleverer than you, and they 'll end by crushing you. I am to have a thousand crowns if I kill you, and then I can marry Marie Tonsard. Well, give me enough to buy a few acres of land and a bit of a cottage, and I 'll keep on saying, as I have done, that I 've found no chance. That will give you time to sell your property and get away; but make haste. I 'm an honest lad still, scamp as I am; but another fellow won't spare you."

"If I give you what you ask, will you tell me who offered you those three thousand francs?" said the general.

"I don't know myself; and the person who is urging me to do the thing is some one I love too well to tell of. Besides, even if you did know it was Marie Tonsard, that would n't help you; Marie Tonsard would be as silent as that wall, and I should deny every word I 've said."

"Come and see me to-morrow," said the general.

"Enough," replied Bonnébault; "and if they begin to say I 'm too dilatory, I 'll let you know in time."

A week after that singular conversation the whole arrondissement, indeed the whole department, was covered with posters, advertising the sale of Les Aigues at the office of Maître Corbineau, the notary of Soulanges. All the lots were knocked down to Rigou, and the price paid amounted to two millions five hundred thousand francs. The next day Rigou had the names changed;

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Monsieur Gaubertin took the woods, Rigou and Soudry the vineyards and the farms. The château and park were sold over again in small lots among the sons of the soil, the peasantry, — excepting the pavilion, its dependencies, and fifty surrounding acres, which Monsieur Gaubertin retained as a gift to his poetic and sentimental spouse.

Many years after these events, during the year 1837, one of the most remarkable political writers of the day, Émile Blondet, reached the last stages of a poverty which he had so far hidden beneath an outward appearance of ease and elegance. He was thinking of taking some desperate step, realizing, as he did, that his writings, his mind, his knowledge, his ability for the direction of affairs, had made him nothing better than a mere functionary, mechanically serving the ends of others; seeing that every avenue was closed to him and all places taken; feeling that he had reached middle-life without fame and without fortune; that fools and middle-class men of no training had taken the places of the courtiers and incapables of the Restoration, and that the government was reconstituted such as it was before 1830. One evening, when he had come very near committing suicide (a folly he had so often laughed at), while his mind travelled back over his miserable existence calumniated and worn down with toil far more than with the dissipations charged against him, the noble and beautiful face of a woman rose before his eyes, like a statue rising pure and unbroken amid the saddest ruins. Just then the porter brought him a letter sealed with black from the Comtesse de Montcornet, telling him of the death of her husband, who



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had again taken service in the army and commanded a division. The count had left her his property, and she had no children. The letter, though dignified, showed Blondet very plainly that the woman of forty whom he had loved in his youth offered him a friendly hand and a large fortune.

A few days ago the marriage of the Comtesse de Montcornet with Monsieur Blondet, appointed prefect in one of the departments, was celebrated in Paris. On their way to take possession of the prefecture, they followed the road which led past what had formerly been Les Aigues. They stopped the carriage near the spot where the two pavilions had once stood, wishing to see the places so full of tender memories for each. The country was no longer recognizable. The mysterious woods, the park avenues, all were cleared away; the landscape looked like a tailor's pattern-card. The sons of the soil had taken possession of the earth as victors and conquerors. It was cut up into a thousand little lots, and the population had tripled between Conches and Blangy. The levelling and cultivation of the noble park, once so carefully tended, so delightful in its beauty, threw into isolated relief the pavilion of the Rendezvous, now the Villa Buen-Retiro of Madame Isaure Gaubertin; it was the only building left standing, and it commanded the whole landscape, or as we might better call it, the stretch of cornfields which now constituted the landscape. The building seemed magnified into a château, so miserable were the little houses which the peasants had built around it.

"This is progress!" cried Émile. "It is a page out of Jean-Jacques' 'Social Compact!' and I — I am harnessed to the social machine that works it! Good

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God! what will the kings be soon? More than that, what will the nations themselves be fifty years hence under this state of things?"

"But you love me; you are beside me. I think the present delightful. What do I care for such a distant future?" said his wife.

"Oh yes! by your side, hurrah for the present!" cried the lover, gayly, "and the devil take the future."

Then he signed to the coachman, and as the horses sprang forward along the road, the wedded pair returned to the enjoyment of their honeymoon.

1845.

THE END.

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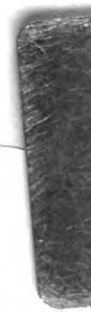

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